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Chapter One Introduction to Terror

Part One Unexplored Space

The Scouter *Calisto* emerged from the hyper space point, bright swirling red and yellow lights circled it. They had arrived in Sector 400k, light years away from Earth and days away from the nearest outpost or colony. Its captain was a veteran of the Corporate Wars and had taken up the job of explorer over military advisor for the Russian Liberation Force research group. The *Calisto* had a fusion drive and was top of the line in technology, a fine example of RLF craftsmanship. The crew consisted of scientists and several planet engineers who were to study the system. Security was made up of a few UEU marines and five RLF Shock Troopers.

"Launching marker beacon." the science officer flicked a switch and the 'woosh' sound of the beacon tube echoed throughout the ship.

"Confirmed," the navigation officer checked the star map, "beacon has been activated and is showing up on the scanners."

"Good job," the captain said as he stood up and looked out the main viewer, "now lets find us some planets. Activate long range sensors."

The image appeared on the screen and the navigation officer plotted a course to the nearest planet. It was a massive planet with twin moons and what looked like an ocean on the surface. The scanners buzzed as the scientists began to work. The captain gave the order for the ship to engage engines and start for the new world.

"Sensors indicate a massive ocean surface, but signs of sulfur dioxide in the atmosphere." the science officer informed the captain. "Permission to launch a probe?"

"Granted." the captain smiled and went to the door to his private office, "I'll be in my office washing up, inform me of anything important."

Captain Tubi Mariner had been the skipper of many ships, all of which had been brutally destroyed during the war. This was the place where he belonged, far from war, far from the United Earth Union. He was in his 50's and had a few more decades to go before he would retire on one of the Pleasure Planets. It was his dream, a thought that would be challenged by current events.

The probe entered the planet's atmosphere and stabilized skimming the surface of the vast ocean. Its' sensors hummed and the small motors scooted the machine along. It was rounded, about 3 feet in diameter with several external antennas and a pair of arms. The sky of this new world had a purple glint to it and there seemed to be no life in sight. It beeped back a coded response to the Scouter and hurried along to the nearest land mass. The water was a glimmering purple which probably explained why the sky was such. As it approached the first island the scanners picked up life readings. A planet with a sulfur dioxide atmosphere yet life none the less. The reading was spread out over a large area, much to large to be an animal or any registered life for. The probe thought it might be a plant, but it would need to get closer and retrieve a sample.

"Look," the science officer got the attention of the probe officer, "it picked up a massive life form reading on the surface."

"Incredible!" the other officer started looking at the sensor readings.

The life form reading was as large as a city making the probe look like an ant. As it drew closer it could make out the form of the thing. It was set in the ground with massive roots spread across the landscape. The probe landed on one of the roots and a small rod popped out of one of the hands. Then there was a flash of light as a beam shot out and cut a sample loose. There was a loud roar throughout the island and then blackness.

"What happened to the probe?" the science officer slid his chair back and looked at the startled probe technical officer.

"I don't know," he said, "it looks like something ate it, swallowed it up or something!"

The navigator had started to dose off when he heard a light beeping from his scanner controls. There was an object approaching from the southern pole of the planet. He activated the long range sensors and smashed his hand on the alarm. Everyone on the bridge looked at him as the bridge lights went from normal to flashing red. "Captain to the bridge, we have a bogie!"

Captain Mariner jumped off his couch and ran onto the bridge. His crew was scurrying to their stations while on the main screen was a large creature. It looked like a blob of tentacles with a fang filled mouth in the middle. It looked like something out of a H.P. Lovecraft novel Tubi thought as he buttoned his uniform coat and sat in his chair. "What is that thing?" he asked the science officer.

"It appears to be organic in nature," the science officer replied, "I'm also picking up a massive energy build up inside of it."

"Raise shields and ready tracking laser." Tubi locked down his ship tight.

The creature halted when the shields went up and created a green glow around the metal snack. It moaned and its' mouth began to glow fiery red. It let out a burp and a blast of energy shot out at the Scouter. The bubble of plasma soared across to the *Calisto*.

"Plasma energy, sir!" the science officer shouted as the flaming bubble came closer.

"Hard to starboard and fire at will!" the captain ordered as the attacker readied itself for another shot.

The first blast of plasma missed as the ship banked right and began its' attack. The tracker laser fired and cut into the creature causing it to prematurely fire its plasma shot. The next laser blast cut off a tentacle and the next caught the creature square in the mouth. Then the thing let out a massive cry of pain and went limp, drifting dead in space.

"That was too easy sir!" the weapons officer announced as he readied for another shot.

"Hold your fire! Send a probe over to get a sample of that thing," the captain ordered as he stood up and walked over to the science officer.

The probe launched and flew over to the dead mass. Then there was a flash and the probe exploded in a ball of plasma energy. From the mouth of the creature came several smaller ones. They looked like their parent, but the size of the probe and they had tails. Moving much more swifter they attacked the *Calisto*.

The Scouter rocked as their shields got pounded by plasma. "Fire back dammit!" Tubi shouted as he ran back to his seat. "How many of those things!"

"I am picking up about fifteen and they are pulverizing our shields, sir!" the science officer screamed as the panel next to him overloaded and exploded. The automated fire fighting system activated as smoke filled the bridge.

The tracker laser was busy taking shots at the little bio monsters that flooded the space around the Scouter. The beams of light cut through their targets causing the creatures blood to ignite the vacuum in a ball of fiery plasma. The *Calisto* rocked as its' shields began to fail, Capt. Mariner watched in shock as his ship began to take on heavy damage.

"Weapons, starlight burst!" he shouted as he gave the order for a starlight burst.

It was a maneuver that only the few brave dared try and Tubi was one of those who liked take a risk. The Starlight Burst was a simultaneous blast from the entire grid causing a solid flash of massive energy which with a good understanding could cause total cleansing of the space around the vessel. The burst also caused system wide burnouts on almost all weapons controls for the tracker which would leave a Scouter defenseless.

The weapons officer flipped open the red box in front of him where the switch for the Starlight Burst was contained. With one final look at the Captain and a nod, the officer slid his finger over the control switch. There was a light hum and the sound built up into a massive roar as the tracker generator overloaded and fired the burst. Outside the *Calisto* the creatures swarmed on the ship and in a single blinding flash of light, one that caught the attention of the giant thing on the surface of the planet, they were vaporized!

Part Two Traitors and Aliens, Oh MY

"Scanners!" Tubi yelled and ran over to the science station.

Ka-Boom! The Scouter rocked as its' shields collapsed! The bridge crew found themselves flung from their seats and the control consoles began to spark and smoke. Tubi wiped his brow as blood attempted to blind him. Taking a quick survey he realized they had been hit hard.

"When did a Starlight Burst cause this to happen?" Captain Mariner grabbed the side of his chair and lifted himself up.

The science officer looked bad, plastic shrapnel covered his face. Blood flowed down his neck and his eyes were open with a slight glaze. His flesh was burned by the flash of flame that had exploded from his sensor screen.

On the deck next to him were two other officers, both lay still, their chests not moving. One man's neck was twisted in an almost impossible position while the other was pinned by a support beam.

"Incoming fire!" the navigation officer shouted, "Taking evasive action, hang on sir!"

The *Calisto* took a sharp dive to the left as a ball of plasma the size of a large asteroid flew by. The ship shook and turned red residual plasma grazed the Scouter.

"What! From where?" Tubi staggered over to the navigator. It was unbelievable, from the surface creature came balls of plasma energy. "Was that what hit us earlier?"

"Yes, I noticed it as the scanners came back on and tried to bring us away from it, but the controls were down." the navigator explained as the skies of the planet lit us from another burst of plasma.

"Land us on the surface; I'll take my chance down there!" Captain Mariner ordered and the navigator didn't hesitate. "Attention all crew, we are going down. Security teams suit up in the Prowlers and all other hands suit up in enviro suits. The atmosphere is sulfur dioxide based so do not open any air locks without orders from the bridge. Medical teams to the bridge."

The Scouter rumbled into the outer atmosphere and the hull began to turn red. There was a thundering boom across the planet's sky as the *Calisto* burst through the cloud cover. The ship stabilized and the landing gear bays creaked open and four metal legs emerged. The outside lights of the ship activated illuminating the land beneath the Scouter.

"Take us down right there." Tubi pointed to a small island located miles from the alien creature.

"Engineering crews standby for landing. Once on the ground do immediate repairs so we can get off this rock."

"Aye, sir." the engineering officer replied over the com-link.

The Scouter settled into place and the engines shut down. The cargo bay doors slide open and five security guards in Prowlers walked down the plank with their automatic shotguns in hand. "This is P1, no sign of life out here, sir."

"Good, secure the area and begin the repairs." Tubi turned to the medical officer who was giving a report of the injured.

"Twelve dead, nine injured." the medical officer handed the captain the medical log.

"My god," Capt. Mariner looked at the list, mostly researchers, but still his crew, "this is over half of the crew. Carry on."

"What about that cut on your head?" the officer pointed to a small gash in the captain's scalp.

"Never mind that, help the other wounded." a plan began to form in Tubi's head.

The repair work was going along smoothly and it didn't look like their would be any surface skirmishes with the monster. P2 looked across the bay at the alien creature and took aim with his shotgun. "Bang!" he smiled and lowered it. There was a heavy set of footsteps echoing down the ramp, metal on metal. As the figure emerged a few of the engineers stopped and looked in terror. Standing there was a Banshee Battle Suit, fully armed and ready for something which wasn't going to be peaceful.

"I need volunteers." a familiar voice came from the suit, it was Captain Mariner.

"A Banshee, but this is a science mission, only Prowlers are allowed." P3 spoke up, but was ignored.

"I'll go." P4 waved his hand and followed by P1, P2, and P5.

"Ok, P3, I want you to make sure the ship is safe." the captain ordered and then mustered his four men.

"Gentleman what I intend to do is drop a fission device in the heart of that creature out there. We might not come back, but I want to make sure that the Scouter can get back to home space and report what we've found. You can change your mind at anytime."

The Prowlers looked at each other and chambered a round in their weapons. That was the answer that Tubi wanted to see, what glory and honor they would have by killing such a monster.

"We'll take a hover platform to the mainland and go by foot from there." he explained as two engineers brought out the vehicle. "

"How will we carry a fission bomb to that location? It's going to be too heavy to carry." P2 asked as they prepped their gear.

"The RLF designed this," Tubi pulled a grenade off his armor and showed it to his men, "a compact fission bomb. A friend of mine gave me one of the prototypes to test on a lifeless world once we got out here. It looks like I'm going to test it on that thing."

"Wow!" P4 was amazed at the device and its' size.

"I can't believe they let him bring a Banshee onboard!" one engineer mumbled as the hover platform sped away.

"Well too bad they won't be coming back." P3 smiled and revealed a small microchip.

"Why did you do that?" another engineer swiped it out of the P3's hand. "I have to report this!"

"Not so fast." the Prowler stepped in front of the man, "We are doing this for the new order."

"What new order?" the man began to panic as the two men backed him close to the water.

"Soon the Galactic Church of Christ will dominate the Universe in the name of God." P3 smiled and drew his auto pistol, sticking it into the engineer's side.

"GCC, my God you're talking about our shipmates out there!" he shouted and the rest of the repair crew stopped and looked on.

"They don't care," the other engineer smiled, "we infiltrated the UEU years ago and took most of the positions on the ship. Sadly some of the security team and a few of the crew weren't converted to our beliefs."

"Jesus!" the man shouted as he tried to escape, but was cut off by two other men.

"Fear not my son, join us or die!" P3 squeezed the trigger and red beam locked onto the engineer's shoulder.

"Kiss off you bastards, all of...." a shot rang out and the bullet ripped into the enviro suit.

Sulfur dioxide filled the man's suit and he began to choke. Blood flowed into his boots from the wound to his shoulder. It was a sadistic shot and on this planet, a painful death. The engineer tried to cry out in pain, but his lungs collapsed and he fell to the ground. His body twitched for a moment and then went limp.

"Take his body into the ship and put it into a stasis pod. Everyone else, finish the repairs on the ship." P3 turned out and looked to see if the platform had made it.

"Ok, this is it. Go by call signs from here on and move out!" Tubi readied his rail gun and slung his vibro axe.

The group headed down a small wooded path that seemed to lead to the alien in the distance. The plant life was more jungle like than anything Captain Mariner would have ever dreamed on a toxic planet such as this. The soil was somewhat solid, but it had a dark purple tone to it. The Prowler's took an odd formation, but Tubi knew that they had never fought along side a Banshee before.

Just then Tubi's motion sensor started to beep and his battle computer activated. There was something up ahead, but only about the size of a dog. "Hold up, there's something up there."

The path had become somewhat dense ahead with leaves from the trees leaning across. There was a small whining sound from behind the plants and the Prowlers stopped in their tracks and raised their shotguns. P1 walked up slowly and reached out to move the massive leaf.

"It sounds like a dog, but here?" P4 took a deep breath and waited to see what it was.

P1 moved the leaf and a medium sized dog with black and white spots walked out. The Prowler stumbled back as the animal got closer to him. "It's only a dog, but how can it breath?"

"Get back P1." P5 grabbed his friend and pulled on his armor.

"You're right, it could be dangerous." P1 took a few steps back and waited for an order.

The dog stood there and tried to get closer to P1 again, but the Prowler backed away. Then the animal began to growl in a deep dark tone. Its' eyes turned white and the fur began to secrete an slimy substance. The paws turned to claws and it's teeth bent outward.

"Holy shit!" P2 backed away and turned to run away, but was greeted by two more mutants. "We're surrounded!"

"Xmorphs!" Tubi shouted as he tightened his grip on his rail gun.

"X what!" P4 shouted as the creature that looked like a dog sprouted tentacles.

"Alien life forms with an unknown form. The RLF warned me about possible life like this, but I could have never dreamed that this would be it." Tubi's computer was busy taking readings as he explained.

"Great so are we supposed to bring back one alive?" P5 asked as he began to shake.

The captain's rail gun fired at the closest of the creatures and ripped it in two blasting pieces of it everywhere. The Prowlers jumped from the sudden scream of the gun. "No, kill them! I'm detecting a contamination factor!"

The creatures began to froth at the mouth and mutated further into a mass of tentacles and teeth. They were similar to the things in space, but they weren't floating. They were black and red in color with a blood like ooze dripping from their bodies. The Prowlers fell into a circle to cover their flank and raised the shotguns to fire. One of the monster's slimy tentacles reached out and grabbed P4, who instinctively pulled the trigger of his weapon. The shotgun blast struck the appendage and split it in two with green blood gushing up into the air. A few drops splattered and landed on P4's arm. There was a slight hiss and a bubbling of plastic and metal.

"My God!" P4 shouted as he shook his arm trying to get the alien substance off.

"Acidic blood! Use long range fire on the shotguns or the auto pistols for up close!" Captain Mariner hollered as he slung his rail gun and drew his pistol and fired a round into the first creature.

"This really sucks, sir!" P5 kicked another creature's tentacle that was reaching for him.

"I think it's eating through the suit!" P4 screamed as the safe environment of his Prowler suit was breached by the acid.

"Gotcha buddy!" P1 sprayed a decontamination medical solution on P4's arm and the acid stopped and dissolved. Then he slapped on a P-4II patch and hit the reset button on P4's life support unit.

"Thanks, man." P4 was shaking, but managed to draw his auto pistol and take a shot at the creature he had splattered with the shotgun.

The monster screeched as the bullet sunk deep and it began to twitch. Tubi spun around and let his auto pistol go full auto. The single pops from the gun turned into a constant hum as the armor piercing rounds ravaged the alien creature. The Prowlers continued to shoot at the monsters that had now begun to flee back into the jungle.

"Hit 'em with the shotguns, men!" Tubi shouted as he holstered his pistol and brought his rail gun back around.

P4 was the first to fire into the jungle with his shotgun. The slug buzzed through the leaves and trees, not knowing a target. The other men followed with a barrage of gunfire that cut what looked like a beautiful jungle down to a pile of lumber. Then the gunfire stopped as the true nightmare of the planet became apparent. Beyond the destruction of the shotgun fire was a giant tentacle, root, vein, whatever you might want to call it. It was about the diameter of the Scouter and the length could not be determined without looking at it from orbit. It was blackish with an odd tint of red to it which seemed to flow through the inside.

"This is bad." P2's jaw dropped in awe as he sized up the massive thing in front of him.

"Um...Sir?" P5 looked at Captain Mariner who himself was gazing at the thing.

"Grenades pull 'em." the war veteran knew that this might be a good striking point from which to hit the creature on the surface.

"Will they work against it?" P1 asked as he removed his stun grenades from their resting place and clicked off the safety.

"It should," P4 did the same, "they seem to be affected by the decom spray and our conventional weapons. A group of stun grenades might knock it out."

"Or piss it off." P1 shook his head in disbelief as they made their way over the mess they had just made to take up a better position to throw the grenades.

"On the count of three." Tubi ordered as he readied a photon grenade. "Three, two, one, throw!"

The Prowler's grenades hit first exploding with a bright blue flash of electrical energy. The Banshee's grenade hit last detonating in a ball of blue and white light. The shockwave from the photon explosion sent the Prowlers to the ground while Captain Mariner stood there. "Get up quick!" Tubi yanked P2 up by his shoulder and pointed to the hole in the wall of the tentacle. It was hollow inside the thing's appendage and looked like a tunnel leading towards the main body.

"Time to be like a disease and hit from the inside!"

The Banshee's boosters activated and it leaped from its' spot down to where the hole was. The Prowlers just stood there and watched trying to figure out if they should go with him. "Sir," P5 shouted, "what about us?"

"Stay here at the entrance and cover me." Tubi quickly glanced inside and looked back out. "If I don't come back in 10 minutes go back to the ship and get off the planet."

"Yes, sir!" P2 replied and they took cover among the fallen trees.

Tubi Mariner didn't plan to die today and running down an unknown creature's vein could easily mean certain death. The idea was brilliant in theory, dropping a fission bomb in the monster's internal structure. The explosion would kill the thing and probably half the life on the planet. It was a small price to pay in order to save humanity if this thing ever got into UEU territory. The Banshee gave him the advantage he needed in order to pick up the pace. Tubi ran down the passageway as his computer compiled data on the structure.

It was very damp and slimy inside the creature's tentacle. The walls were lined with several layers of film stretching from the ceiling to the floor acting like filters. There was a minor wind current sucking towards the center of the thing. The inside was also lit by phosphorus or something very similar. There didn't seem to be any acidic content in the slime on the floor.

The humidity was almost at 100% and the heat from the inside had to have been about 110 degrees.

As Captain Tubi drew closer to the middle his computer picked up life signs ahead. The Banshee stopped and drew his vibro-axe, the blade hummed softly. From the passage came two creatures, resembling man-sized apes with a jelly like skin and visible veins pumping green blood. Their eyes were bloodshot and they stood there in silence like sentries.

"Get the hell out of my way!" Tubi shouted as he waved the axe in a threatening manner, but the things just stood there. When they didn't move he reached for his auto pistol and that's when the things reacted.

They let out a roar and charged at the Banshee who answered their battle cry with a hail of bullets. The hits were exact and precise punching holes through their skulls sending green blood and brains flying out the back. The monsters fell to their knees and rocked back and forth. The Banshee stood there for a second to see what would happen next and then decided to run by. Just as he got past the two creatures one of them reached out and grabbed his leg.

Tubi whipped around to be greeted by a very mad looking pair of monsters. The captain swept his vibro axe up and cut off one of the creature's arms. There was a roar and the other thing jumped at the Banshee who spun the axe across and sliced the alien in half at the waist. Guts dropped onto the slime covered floor and the monster lay still. Its counterpart tried to punch the human, but was met halfway by the blade of the axe slicing through the top of its' skull. Yet, the blade didn't stop there, it continued down until it had completely severed the beast in half.

"They must be able to transmit their thoughts to the master creature and it adapts to the hostiles it encounters." Capt. Mariner took a quick look around and leaped over the two corpses.

"P3," one of the engineers shouted, "all repairs are complete. We are ready to launch."

"Good, load up and meet me on the bridge." P3 or Tarren Core as he was known to the GCC was ready to carry out his master plan.

On the bridge, the navigation officer had been monitoring the captain's mission on the scanners. The bridge door slid open and Tarren walked in still suited in his Prowler. The officers saluted and the navigator turned to see why everyone was doing it.

"Is this a joke?" the navigation officer shouted as he turned all the way around.

"This is no joke, Lt. Foster." Tarren drew his auto pistol and pointed it at the officer. "In the name of God and all humanity I am taking this ship back to GCC territory. Join us or die!"

"Get off the bridge! That's an order!" Lt. Foster shouted and a shot rang out. The navigation officer fell to his knees as his legs gave out. Looking down he could see where the bullet had punched through his chest plate and left a round in his heart. The room began to spin and he found it harder to breath, then blackness.

"Get that mess off the bridge and prepare to launch." Tarren removed his helmet and let his blond hair dry out. He looked at the captain's chair and smiled, somewhere out there was Capt. Mariner trying to save the human race. This planet would serve as his grave for eternity, such a fitting end to a war hero.

The four Prowlers were sitting there on the fallen trees keeping a watch out for their captain, but there was no sign and the ten minutes had been up a while ago. "Now what?" P2 asked as he looked at his time screen in his helmet.

"I don't want to leave him here, but P2 is right. Lets move out and head back to the ship." P4 stood up and made his way to the ground, followed by the rest of the men.

As they hit the clearing where the hover platform was waiting for them they noticed that the ship's engines had been fired. The *Calisto* began to lift off, the Prowlers just watched as their escape off this nightmare world flew up into the clouds. The hope of returning home had faded away and P1 turned back and looked down the path from where they had just come.

"We won't have enough air; we're as good as dead." P5 just shook his head and gripped his shotgun.

"Ok team," P1 loaded a round into his shotgun and pointed back towards the great beast; "we're going back and help the captain!"

The Prowlers raised their weapons and cheered, knowing that it was all over no matter what. Then there was a flash and a woosh from the monster. It was firing on the Scouter, which wasn't a bad thing at all they thought. Then the clouds split open and a massive flash of white light shot down on their position. The Prowler's were blinded by the light and before they knew it they were unconscious.

"This is it," Tubi thought, "now it's time to test this thing." The Banshee pulled around his rail gun and loaded the fission bomb into the grenade launcher. There was a confirmation beep and the red light on the gun went on. Tubi took a deep breath and aimed down the passageway to where the middle of the alien was according to the scanners. "Eat this you bastard!"

The gun fired and the bomb headed down the tunnel. Capt. Mariner turned around and began to run towards the exit, but was cut off by seven more of the ape creatures. The rail gun screamed as it cut down the creatures, but they just got back up after being knocked down. Tubi paused and realized he was almost out of time. He brought his weapon upward and fire into the ceiling until the purple light of day began to shine through. The beasts charged the Banshee, but weren't fast enough as Tubi engaged the thrusters and flew up and out the hole he had just made.

Then it hit him, the bomb hadn't gone off! Looking at his battle computer readout he noticed that someone had removed the detonator chip. There was one last chance and Tubi took it as he reached 3 thousand feet. The

transmitter on the Banshee was powerful enough to reach the bomb deep inside. "Ok, so I was betrayed by someone on the ship, but they didn't count on this!"

The Banshee sent the signal and there was a loud burp from the alien giant and then a flash of yellow and red light burst out of the side of the creature. Tubi smiled and looked to where the Scouter should have been, it was gone! "Oh shit! This is the end, sorry my daughter."

Part Three Horror Onboard the *Calisto*

The Scouter approached the jump point and Tarren looked at the monitor as the planet they were just on grew farther away. There was a small flash on the surface and then the cloud cover was ripped open by a fiery mushroom cloud. The terrorist smiled as the surface of the planet caught on fire. "Make the jump to hyper space!" he ordered and leaned back in the chair.

Space swirled open and the *Calisto* slipped into hyper space. In the ship's morgue there was a howl from the stasis pod and a loud cracking sound. A medical technician heard the sound and opened the door to the cold room where they kept the bodies and stasis pods. He looked around and activated the lights. It was dim and eerie; steam was still drifting off the fresh bodies of those who had been killed by the alien attack and by other means.

"Hello?" he called out wearily and picked up a laser scalpel on a nearby table.

There was a light scraping sound of glass across metal coming from the area where the stasis pods were located. The man walked over and his heart skipped a beat. The pod where one of the engineer's body's was kept had been cracked open. The body was undamaged except for a bullet wound to the shoulder. There was a slimy secretion oozing from the mouth and there were also slight traces of it on the broken glass. The technician took a step back and ran out of the room and sealed the door.

Tarren had gone back to his quarters to freshen up a bit before they came out of hyper space. Everything had gone as planned, except finding the alien on the planet, which had caused a few delays. "The days of the UEU are numbered now." he thought as he washed his face. Standing there looking in the mirror he began to remember how the GCC had condemned him for his extreme and radical views on religion. From that day on he became obsessed with crushing the UEU to prove that only the children of Christ would make it into the next century.

"Sir, we have a problem." Lance Gordon came over the com-link, a friend of Tarren's from the GCC colony of Bethal, "A medical technician reports that something is going on in the morgue. Do you want me to investigate?"

"What does 'something' refer to?" Tarren wiped off his face and set his towel down.

"One of the stasis pods cracked." he replied.

"Which one?" Tarren walked over to his bunk and picked up his auto pistol which he'd kept after taking the Prowler off.

"It was the engineer who you shot outside of the ship." Lance almost sounded sarcastic.

"Check it out! Be careful, we might have some UEU agents onboard." Tarren checked the clip and slapped it back in.

Lance took two men down into the morgue with him each armed with stun rods. The passageway to the morgue was dark for some reason. One of the men hit the light control and the ceiling sparked. The lights had shorted out or something, Lance continued down the hall looking up to make sure nothing was going to fall on him.

"Hello?" Lance called out and the medical technician stepped out of the shadows startling all three men.

"I sealed the room off, but I think something is in the venting ducts." he explained as they walked into the medical lab. "Then I heard noises coming from inside the freezer just a few moments ago."

"Open the door and let's see this." Lance turned on his stun rod and the other two men took up flanking positions.

The technician pushed the control on the door and it slide open. Mist poured into the lab and the smell of rotted flesh and sulfur dioxide touched the noses of the people in the room. Lance choked and moved back waving his arm trying to clear out his vision a little bit. The other two men moved as well trying to get a breath of fresh air. The technician looked at them and then into the morgue where he became witness to another horror.

"God forgive us!" the technician screamed as he fell on his back.

Standing there at the door was a corpse of a dead medic who had been killed by the alien attack. His face was soft and pale, the veins where bright green and there was a transparent slime running down his chin. His eyes where bloodshot and green as well, almost glowing. Behind him were several other dead crew members with the same likeness.

"Hit the decom switch!" Lance shouted to one of the men who ran over to the controls.

The other man switched on his rod and poked on the corpses sending an electrical shock through it. There was a high pitched screech and it stumbled back in pain. The man turned to another one which had begun to approach. Its mouth opened and a glob of goo shot out and struck the man in the face.

"That is sick, eat this you....what the hell!?" the man screamed as the goo came to life and began to seep into his skin. Some of it found other ways into his body through the mouth, nose eyes and ears. He desperately tried to remove it, but it had gotten him good. His body began to burn as the alien infected him, his head began to pound and his bladder let go.

Lance just stood there and gave the signal to the other man to hit the switch. Just as the man reached down the light fixture about him exploded and three tentacles swung down and grabbed him. In a matter of seconds the thing in the ceiling had pulled him up and silenced the man. Blood dripped from above as Lance fled out the door leaving the medical technician alone.

" Please forgive me, Lord." the technician prayed as the dead crew got closer. He looked up and they had surrounded him, looking with a blank stare. Their mouths opened and they sprayed him with alien goo.

Lance heard the screams of the technician as he reached the lift. He hit the button and waited with his stun rod ready. A figure appeared at the end of the hall, the green eyes gave it away to what it was. Yet, it just stood there and watched Lance who was beginning to panic.

"What is taking so long?" he hit the button again and looked back as the thing just stood there in silence.

"SOON." it said in a gurgled voice, " YOU WILL BE CONSUMED."

"Never!" Lance shouted as the lift door opened and he turned to get in.

Slap! Lance flew backwards and smacked his head on the deck. Tentacles thrashed out of the lift and wrapped around his legs. Lance grabbed the stun rod and zapped the creature, but it was no use. There was a burning sensation in his legs which then spread up into the rest of his body. There was a pounding in Lance's head and then a pop, his head went limp and the room went dark.

Tarren arrived on the bridge in a fresh uniform, one of the GCC. It was one he had worn with pride and honor for years before his fall from grace. Now he had a great prize, a Scouter of the UEU, something unheard of in the history of the GCC. He looked at the monitor watching the spatial distortion of hyper space. It was beautiful and amazing to look at, one could get lost in it all.

The *Calisto* began to shake all of a sudden and Tarren held fast to his chair. "What was that?"

" We've lost power to the med lab and one of the lifts." the new science officer quickly sped through the status reports. " It's affecting the shields and the drive systems."

"Where's Mr. Gordon?" Tarren caressed his pistol.

"His team hasn't reported in yet and I can't get through to the lab at all or the morgue." the man finished.

"The engine room reports that they are losing power and that the lift to the med lab has been destroyed!" the bridge engineer reported.

"How?" Tarren was becoming impatient and stood up. "I'm going down to the lab!"

Two other men followed as the GCC agent exited the bridge and made his way for the captain's private lift. The crew on the bridge looked at each other and began to compensate for the power loss. The navigator adjusted the course and leaned back in his seat stretching his arms. Then he felt a wetness on his hand and looked up. There was something dripping from the ceiling, it was transparent and very slimy. He tried to wipe it off on his chair and then there was a burning sensation.

"What is this?" the navigator said as he rubbed it more, " Oh my God! It's burning me! Someone help!"

The science officer ran over and looked at the substance to see what it might be. Then there was another drip and another, this time hitting the scientist on the neck. By this time most of the crew on the bridge had begun to notice the ooze from above and how the navigator was freaking out. The bridge engineer activated the internal scanners and his eyes bulged out.

"Hostile life form?" the man mumbled and looked back the scene, then glancing upward to see a large shadow forming.

The science officer began to scream in pain as the ooze on his neck began to seep through his skin. By this time the navigator had lost consciousness and was slumped against his controls. The rest of the bridge crew began to panic and ran for the lift. The doors opened and the first of the crew members became entangled in tentacles. There wasn't even enough time for a scream as he was ingested into the creature.

The service passage was dark, only partially lit by red emergency lights. The three men stopped at the doorway to the main hall where the destroyed lift was. Tarren drew his gun and gestured the other two men to open the door. The men forced the door open and stepped back. The hall was a slimy mess and there were traces of blood on the wall. One of the men peaked in and saw a stun rod on the deck. He entered the hall and tried not to slip on the stuff on the floor.

"Be careful!" Tarren shouted as he pushed past the engineer and headed towards the morgue. "Where is Mr. Gordon!?"

"I don't see him, but this is a mess." the man said as he reached down to pick up the rod.

"Go back to the bridge and have then seal up this deck and activate all internal scanners." Tarren ordered as he stepped through the door to where his friend was supposed to be.

"I'm on it." the other man replied as he headed back to the lift.

Tarren looked around the med lab, the ceiling had collapsed and there were two stun rods on the floor near the entrance to the morgue. Then he heard shuffling from one of the corners of the room. Standing in a corner was Lance Gordon, or at least something resembling him. His eyes were bloodshot and his skin was jelly-like, the veins glowing green tone. His uniform was ripped from the knees down and his hair looked like it had partly fallen out.

"Lance," Tarren waved his hand, "what is going on here? What happened to you?"

"CONSUME." he replied in a deep gurgled voice and began to walk towards Tarren.

"Consume?" Tarren raised his weapon and clicked off the safety.

"WE WILL CONSUME." Lance moaned as he drew closer.

Outside the room the other man had picked up the stun rod and heard the conversation inside the med lab. He went to take a step and found his foot was stuck to the floor. Looking down he wanted to scream as the floor came to life and the slime shot up his legs! The engineer struggled to break free, but before he could call for help the mass of ooze swallowed him whole.

"Stand back, Lance!" Tarren's hand began to shake as the thing resembling his friend drew closer.

"CONSUME." it called out again as it reached for the human.

Shots rang out and the auto pistol sprayed down the thing. Bullets punched through the skin and out the other side. Tarren heard a crash from the morgue and five more things appeared.

He was trapped by these monsters and his only choice was to kill them. Tarren fired until his gun ran out of ammo and then he just stood there. "Lord save me!" he shouted as the monsters spit goo at him. Tarren began to gasp for air as his body was consumed by the alien organism. It was only a matter of minutes before he would be no more.

The engine room was silent as the engineering officer heard the screams of the bridge crew on the com-link. Harry Lister had been an engineer for the GCC colony ships for years. Never before had he been put in a spot where he would have to make a command decision. He looked at the engineers who he worked with and went over to the ship's distress beacon control.

"Ok, boys." Harry said as he activated the long range communication system, "We can't take the ship into UEU space like this, even if we are part of a revolution. If this thing gets to our space it could get to the GCC colonies." On that note he began his message to any ship that might find them.

This is the engineering officer of the Scouter Class ship 'Calisto' to any and all ships. We have taken on a hostile alien life form that has killed most of the crew. It was discovered in sector 400k, on an unexplored planet in that system. The ship's captain is dead along with most of the crew and soon it will make it's way to the engine room. All scientific information on the creature will be downloaded into this signal. One final message "Praise Jesus!"

Chapter Two Revolution on the Home front

Part One A Day at the Races

Location: Luna Bay, Hawaii on the planet Earth.

"It's a beautiful day here at Luna Bay for the annual Jet Force Races." the reporter announced as his hover platform took position in the middle of the raceway.

It was a sunny day with only a few clouds and a light gust. The ocean was calm for the Jet Force Race, an annual race that the UEU and RLF put on for jet jockeys. It was here that the pride and joy of the Space Force made names for themselves. It was where new upcoming pilots could show their stuff and maybe get recruited by the RLF as test pilots. Almost every admiral and general from the UEU attended the race so that they could see upcoming candidates.

At the hangers the pilots got their jets ready for the day's events. One man in particular watched as his crew worked on last minute adjustments. He was about 5ft 6' with black hair cut high and dry. His flight jacket had patches from raves and punk bands that he loved so much. His eyebrow was pierced along with his lip and the sunglasses resembled something the long dead artist John Lennon might have worn. His name was Mark Redford, a punk from New Canada which was located just outside the Milky Way Galaxy. His attitude was all punk and he loved to fly dangerously which gave him the name *Suicide* by his fellow pilots. There were only a few people that had balls enough to keep up with him. Mark knew them all too well and hated them, especially since one of them was a snout mouth girl by the name of Lisa Mariner. The other was a rich kid by the name of Brad Hogun, who had been promoted to Major in the Space Force.

Lisa looked over at Mark who was breaking into one of his punk modes where he would yell at his pit crew for no reason. Lisa was the daughter of a Starship captain who had taken an assignment to explore unknown regions of sector 400k. In his absence she had taken up flying at the Space Force flight school and excelled past everyone in her class. She had medium blue hair, tied back in a pony tail so her flight helmet would fit. Her call sign was *Pixie* since she was so small and only 17 years old.

Lastly, there was Brad Hogun, son to Admiral Richard Hogun of the UEU elite. Taking his father's money, Brad designed the ultimate fighter and had the RLF factory on Pluto build it for him. Born with natural skill for machines and rated by the ESPER Corps as a telemechanic, he was a natural for flying. He had short, puffed blond hair, and stood a little taller than Mark. Brad's call sign was *Raptor* since he loved the hunt.

The signal light came on in the hanger and the pilots put on their helmets and jumped in their fighter's cockpits. The huge door opened and the sunlight lit up the bay. Jet engines fired and one by one they launched out across the water. The spectators cheered as the contestants headed towards the course.

"Get ready to burn you little bitch." Mark called over Lisa on the com-link.

"Don't worry," she replied, "I'll make sure to call your mother after I get done fucking you. Wouldn't want her to get jealous!"

"Hey, what's that supposed to mean!" Mark clamped his teeth down and turned red.

"Incest is best trash boy!" Brad laughed and did one final check of his systems before the race began.

"All pilots," the announcer came over the com-link, "are you ready?"

"Ready." Lisa smiled.

"Fuck yeah!" Mark tightened his grip on the stick.

"Ready, zzzz." Brad yawned and looked over at Mark's junk mobile of a jet.

The rest of the contestants called in as ready and the countdown began. There was a three light count and then the jets would begin the course over the Pacific Ocean. All the jets lined up and lowered their speeds to match the race standard starting speed. Red, yellow, green, and off they went, afterburners glowing white hot.

Brad was in the lead, his mind reaching out to his jet; there was no need to open his eyes.

Lisa was in second followed by Mark and a few others. The race was being viewed on the monitor by the UEU brass. It was a short race, but worth seeing who they could get to join the UEU Space Force.

"That ESPER is impressive." Admiral Paqui clapped and looked at his fellow brass.

"So is Captain Mariner's daughter and that junk heap behind her." Major Zorn pulled out his mini computer and started a background check on the pilots.

Marks' fighter was an old Sting fighter from the first Union War. He had revamped it and put a few new touches to it, but it still lacked where the original fighter did. Yet, even flying against a bunch of new jets, Mark earned his name *Suicide* by pushing his jet until pieces started falling off. One by one the jets behind him fell back for fear that he'd crash into them.

Lisa looked in her rear monitor and smiled, as much as she hated Mark, his craziness made her like his company. "I think your engine fell out, Suicide."

"Oh yeah, well watch this!" Mark shouted as he clicked on his ace in the sleeve. The jets were already at mach 7, but Mark had installed an old hyper space jumper in his fighter. Mach 7 became mach 13 as the jet began to glow and the air around him became distorted.

"Yikes!" Lisa yelped as Mark blew past her and sucked her jet into the dimensional wake.

Brad saw what happened and pulled up hard to avoid the temporal wake that *Suicide* had caused. As quick as his mind was and his jet, Mark ripped through and pulled Brad's toy into the wake along with Lisa. The jets in the back of the race got thrown around and the pilots had to bail out as the jets one by one hit the water. Admiral Paqui stood up as the orbital alarms sounded; Marks' stunt had set off the hyper space security alarms in orbit around Earth.

High above the planet, the heavy battle cruiser *Ironsides* moved out of space dock. Its skipper, Admiral Tanaka, turned to his communications officer and waited for a call for help.

"Admiral, the subspace distortion was caused by an old hyper space engine." the science officer looked up.
"Get that idiot, Admiral Paqui, on the horn!" he shouted and turned to his main view screen.
On the surface, Admiral Paqui was having all he could do to keep from blowing his top.
"Get that pilot in now!" he screamed and then turned to Major Zorn, "Get out there and shut that thing down. Shoot him down if you have to!"
"Ok, but on Galactic News?" the Major knew it was not going to look good either way.
"Jesus, Mark!" Brad shouted across the com-link, "Shut that off before the orbital sensors go off!"
"Too late," Lisa interrupted, "Admiral Paqui is screaming on my com-link."
"Take it easy guys," Mark laughed and flipped up the shutdown panel that hid the switch for the drive. "I've got it all under control." He hit the switch, but nothing happened.
Major Zorn suited up and jumped into his Stingray, which was waiting for him on the other side of the hanger. The engines fired up and the fighter took off with a roar! Zorn checked his scanners and activated the battle computer; the weapons log confirmed all systems ready.
"This is Major Zorn of the UEU," he called out to Mark over the com-link, "you are in direct violation of hyper space regulations and must shut down immediately or be shot down!"
"Um," Mark frowned and replied, "I'm having a slight problem here. It's not going to shut down and you're not going to shoot me down!" With that the Sting banked right causing Lisa and Brad to be thrown from the wake.
Brad gained control of his fighter and began to pursue Mark's rogue jet. Lisa went into a spin, but managed to pull out of it and swung around to follow Brad. The Sting was making waves in it's temporal wake and leaving a path of distorted space behind it. Zorn's Stingray took up a position above Mark and did a scan of the jet. Just as the computer started to complete it's scan the whole Stingray shut down!
"Sorry, sir!" Brad blew between the two and left the Major coasting. "He may be an asshole, but he's our friend! I used a little of my personal touch on your fighter."
"Dammit," Zorn hit his fist on the fire control and just watched, "I hate ESPERS!"
"Good job," Lisa managed to pick up enough speed so match Mark, "but hurry up with any plan you have, my jet won't hold up much longer."
"What are you going to do?" Mark asked as the hyper space jump alarm came on. "Um, whatever you have in mind, hurry, the jump alarm came on. If I can't shut it down I'll end up somewhere in deep space!"
"Hold on tight!" Brad shouted and he went silent. His mind reached out to the Sting and merged with the main computer. *There was a glitch in the transfer system, something over looked. There, slow down and shut down hyper space systems. Shut down* he pressed his thoughts harder into the machine. *Deactivate and eject pilot! Confirmed, systems shutting down.* "Have a nice swim!"
"Whaaaaaaaat!" Mark gripped his harness tight as the canopy shot off and his seat flew out of the Sting.
Zorn was about to hit the water when his Stingray reactivated and converted to Warrior mode. The Major was confused, but he figured the ESPER must have told his computer to reactivate after a certain amount of time. Someone was going to be in trouble, big trouble.
Mark hit the water hard, but his Sting's life raft activated which kept him from sinking with the seat. He swam up to the raft and pulled himself in, laughing the whole way. "Far out!"
Lisa swooped down at clicked in her afterburners, causing a shockwave that sent a wave up and over the raft. "You are such an ass, *Suicide!*" She grumbled as Mark gave her the finger.
Brad turned his jet around to return to the hanger when he was greeted by a squadron on Stingrays. "You are all under arrest for violation of UEU Hyper space Laws, report back to the hangers ASAP!" one of the pilots ordered over the com-link.

Part Two **The Trial of Suicide**

The cell was dark with little light; the only furniture was a bunk and a small toilet. The walls were black and the small blue light that lit the room provided barely any form of illumination. Sitting in the middle of the room was a single figure with his chin to his chest.

The peep hole on the door slid open and a pair of eyes looked in.

"Mark Redford," the guard said in a heavy tone, "you have visitors, so get up!"

The lock on the cell door beeped and slid open to reveal two guards wearing padded armor and carrying stun rods. They each grabbed an arm of the pilot and dragged him from the room. The hallway was quite and the cell doors looked chaotic in their form. The prison ship was truly a miserable place to be for anyone, human or not. When they reached the visiting area they sat Mark down in one of the cold metal chairs.

"Wait here." one of the guards scowled and walked away.

The visiting area consisted of a room with duraplex separating the prisoner from the visitor. There was a chair for the inmate and on the other side two more chairs for company. When the light turned on in the guest area it revealed two officers, one was Admiral Paqui himself, and the other was a Space Force major.

"That stunt you pulled at the race was not very bright." Paqui scorned him in a strong Indian accent.

"Not only that," the major spoke out, "but Admiral Tanaka wants to see you get the chair for this."

"But we have a deal for you." Admiral Paqui smiled and pulled out a set of papers.

"Oh, fuck you pops!" Mark stood up, but the guards pushed him back down in the chair.

"Hold your tongue, kid!" the guard shouted and switched on his stun rod.

"You can either rot forever in a cell or you can take this set of orders we have for you." Paqui reached in his jacket and pulled out a holo projector. "We have a mission we need to carry out and need a pilot like you to fly the freighter."

"You must be joking!" Mark laughed and crossed his arms, "There are plenty of pilots out there to fly mission like that."

"It's not that simple," the major leaned forward; "it's involving certain elements that are Top Secret."

"Give it up guys; I'm not flying a ship for you that are going to get me into more trouble than I'm already in." Mark shook his head and closed his eyes for a second.

"Let's just put it a different way." the major stood up, "That little girl that buzzed you, she could end up in prison as well along with that rich kid!"

"Do I care," Mark paused and thought about it, "They mean nothing to me." That wasn't the story though; Mark loved both Brad and Lisa very much. With all the fighting they did he could always trust them to save his ass and they did time and again. He knew he'd have to take the deal that the UEU was offering.

"Well that's not what they said to Admiral Hogun." Admiral Paqui glared at him.

"I want to know a little more about this mission." Mark coughed and looked at them blankly.

"All you need to know is that it involves Captain Mariner, Lisa's father." the major sat back down and waited for a response.

"Lisa's dad? I'll take it, but I'd better get a pardon after this." Mark stood up and walked for the door.

"We'll see you at the trial Mr. Redford." Admiral Paqui smiled with satisfaction.

"Not a word to anyone about his." the major got up and straightened his uniform.

It was the day of the trial and most of the UEU's top brass were in attendance. The courtroom was full and also present were as small compliment of Shock Troopers. Lisa Mariner and Brad Hogun were sitting in the front row with Marks' lawyer. The prosecution looked like they were ready to burn Mark at the stake. The room went silent when the Tribunal entered the room, he was garbed in a black robe and a curly white wig rested on his head.

"All rise for the honorable Judge Baxter." called out one of the Shock Troopers and everyone stood up.

"You may be seated." Judge Baxter ordered in a broken old voice. He looked at Mark and scowled in disgust. "We are here today because of the ignorance of a man who put his own personal greed for victory in front of the safety of this planet. By using a hyper space drive in our atmosphere you could have destroyed us all. No to mention you managed to set off every orbital alarm. How do you plead, Mark Redford?"

Mark stood up and looked at the brass, confused by what he should say. Then Admiral Paqui raised his hand and got the attention of the judge. Admiral Tanaka turned bright red and clenched his fist in anger.

"Yes Admiral?" the judge acknowledged Paqui who then stood up and approached the bench.

The room went silent as the Admiral whispered to the judge and handed him an envelope. The judge opened it and read the letter inside, his face went pale and he looked at Mark. Admiral Paqui went back to his seat, winking at Mark on the way by.

"What is that about?" Lisa looked at Paqui as he sat down.

"I don't know, but it doesn't look good." Brad leaned over to his father who was sitting next to him. "Dad, what is going on?"

"The UEU cut a deal with Mark." Admiral Hogun turned back to the front and took a deep breath.

"By the order of the UEU high command," the judge picked up his gavel, "Mark Redford is to be put into their custody." With that he slammed the hammer on the mount in front of him.

The room went from silence into a roar of anger as Admiral Tanaka jumped up and ran over to Admiral Paqui. "WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?" Tanaka screamed as he grabbed Paqui by the sleeve.

"It is a matter of UEU security," Paqui pushed Tanaka away, "so get away from me!"

"You son of a bitch!" Admiral Tanaka pushed Paqui into the crowd of officers behind him.

The Shock Troopers grabbed Mark and escorted him from the room. Lisa and Brad tried to follow, but were stopped by Admiral Hogun. Brad looked at his father with wonder *What is he hiding?* Lisa turned around to watch Paqui and Tanaka act like children. The scene was out of control as the UEU brass started swinging at each other. A major grabbed Paqui and pulled him from the fray and took him outside.

Today the UEU was embarrassed by two of their top ranking officers. Admiral Tanaka of the UEU heavy battleship Ironside and Admiral Paqui of the UEU Earth Command got into a fist fight over a ruling made by the Honorable Judge Baxter. Apparently the UEU made a deal with rogue pilot, Redford, which would liberate him of all charges. The exact details of the bargain are still unknown, but the UEU had better teach their officers how to behave.

"My GOD!" Admiral Wentworth screamed as he threw his TV remote at Admiral Tanaka and Admiral Paqui. "What the hell is your problem, Tanaka? I can't believe the skipper of our most powerful battleship would act so savage on public TV!"

"But sir!" Tanaka interrupted only to be cut off.

"SHUT UP!" Wentworth's eyes grew large with anger. "Take your ship and get out of the system today! I have ordered the *Ironside* to investigate the disappearance of the Scouter *Calisto*, you leave today! Now get the hell out of my office and take the rogue pilot Brad Hogun with you. Drop him at the Pluto RLF factory on your way out!"

"Yes, Admiral Wentworth!" Tanaka stood up and stormed out of the office.

Paqui just sat there and smiled his dumb Indian grin. Wentworth looked at him and pulled from his desk a folder that read TOP SECRET in big red letters on it. "Now for your orders Admiral Paqui."

Part Three Goodbyes

Lisa looked up at the shuttle that was resting on the landing pad. Mark stood next to her with his arm around wrapped over her shoulder. They remained silent for a moment and then Mark turned Lisa to face him.

"I'm sorry it happened like this," he said in a soft voice as he held her chin.

"It's ok," Lisa let a tear fall down her cheek, "first my father vanishes and now you are leaving."

Mark hugged Lisa and held her tight; he could feel her heartbeat against his. He took in a deep breath to smell her hair, it always smelled like peaches. There was a sense of peace at that second and the two looked into each others eyes. A light breeze blew across them, sending Lisa's blue hair into her face. Mark brushed it aside and pressed his lips to hers. His heart fluttered as did hers as they kissed, it seemed to last forever, or at least they wanted it that way. The sun began to set, setting the sky on fire with bright yellows and oranges.

"We need to board now." Major Zorn walked by the two, understanding how it was to be in love.

"Good luck." Lisa hugged Mark one last time and then let him go.

"See you sometime soon!" Mark waved as he entered the lift to the UEU shuttle.

Brad stood there in the background for a moment and then moved out of the shadows.

"So you two were in love. I thought you hated him, but it was a good act. I was convinced you hated him."

"Well I didn't." she cried and turned back to the shuttle as its engines fired.

"I loved him too," Brad smiled, "that's why my dad got him orders to Gateway Station."

"What!" Lisa screamed as she spun around and hugged him.

Hours later on the bridge of the *Ironside* Admiral Tanaka was preparing his ship for departure from the orbital dry dock. The bridge officers and crew looked ready to do battle. They always did though, 3 wars later and he still had the same crew. They all loved Tanaka and his kill or be killed attitude, something that gained him favor with the UEU. He even served with Captain Mariner and Admiral Hogun during the first MORDUM War, which had been taken all the way to Earth. This mission would have meaning; it was to find the *Calisto*, the ship of his friend Tubi Mariner.

"Attention all hands!" Admiral Tanaka announced over the communications network on the ship, "Prepare to launch. Once out of space dock we will proceed to Pluto's RLF factory and then to the hyper space jump point." He looked at his navigation officer and nodded.

The *Ironside's* drive system activated and the fusion reactors activated. There was a loud boom across the ship as they left the UEU dock. The ships lights made it glow in the backdrop of space and Tanaka could see the

replacement battleship in the distance. The medium battleship *Raven* was a very impressive ship, but nothing in firepower compared to the *Ironsides* and Tanaka always let the skipper of the ship, Commander Canney, know it. The *Ironsides* dwarfed out the smaller ship as they passed each other.

Commander Canney sat on his bridge and snickered. He had seen the fight on the UEU TV station and had laughed so hard he had fallen out of his seat. Admiral Tanaka was the laughing stock of the fleet.

"Shall we fire on them?" the weapons officer smiled as he tapped the fire control.

"Use the flare laser and hit them across the bridge. That should be good for a laugh!" Canney smiled and his bridge crew all started laughing.

"Sir," the science officer turned to the Admiral, "we are being locked onto by the...." his words were cut off as a bright flash cut across the bridge.

The bridge crew rubbed their eyes and started grumbling. Tanaka stood up and snapped his fingers at the communications officer. "Oh Commander Canney," Tanaka scowled, "you have fired on us I see. You think that's funny?"

"Tag you're it, Admiral Tanaka," don't throw a temper tantrum."

Laughing came over the communication and the UEU space dock picked up on it. The station's flight control officers knew what was going to happen next and sent a signal to the dock's tugs. A dead silence fell over the entire station as they looked out the portholes and viewing areas.

"Lock starboard heavy pulse cannons onto the *Raven's* engines and wait for my command." Tanaka ordered and his weapons officer laughed as he set the target.

"Commander!" the science officer shouted.

"Raise shields!" Canney shouted before his science officer could yell out a warning.

"Their shields are up." Tanaka's science officer grinned.

"Take them all down and their engines! Make it a one barrage K/O!" Tanaka laughed and the heavy pulse cannon's fired.

Red and yellow light burst from the *Ironsides's* cannons and slammed into the *Raven*. There was a massive flash and thunder as the beams knocked out the shields and burned into the hull. The *Raven's* drive system went dead and the ship began to drift.

"Oh Commander," Tanaka laughed along with his bridge crew, "bang, you're dead. Have fun in space dock for the next 4 months."

"You'll go to....." Click, the communication went dead.

"Good job men, nothing like testing the old weapons before a mission." Admiral Tanaka slapped his knee and laughed.

"Space dock said it was too bad the *Raven* had a system failure." the communications officer informed Tanaka.

"Tell space dock, thank you. Take us out of here." Tanaka ordered and sat back down in his chair.

Meanwhile in the lounge, Brad was playing cards with one of the cooks. He heard the cannons and went to the window, seeing a medium battleship drifting by, its' engine's and aft had looked like they had been melted.

"Did we fire on them?" Brad looked to the cook who was peaking at the rogue pilot's cards.

"Yeah," he answered in a gruffy voice, "that's the *Raven*, the skipper always gives them shit. They must have made him mad, probably the laser flare they fired at the bridge. The Admiral won't get in trouble, they are right near the space dock. The tugs will get them."

"Yikes," Brad went back to the table and sat down, "my dad would never do that to someone."

"Who Admiral Hogun?" the cook laughed, "He once ran the battleship *Longfellow* into a GCC cargo ship once after they hit the ship with hull paint bombs. Grounded his shields to theirs until they had none left. It was a riot."

My dad was like that? I never would have thought him to be a hardcore skipper. Brad thought as he looked at his hand. There were two cards missing and two new ones in their place. Brad looked at the cook and then back at his cards. "What the hell?"

"Rule #1," the cook laughed, "is never turn your back on your opponent."

"Oh I see." Brad closed his eyes and reached out his mind. *Contact, fire extinguisher activate, 5 seconds, now.*

The fire extinguisher activated and a burst of foam sprayed down on the cook who fell out of his chair. Standing up, he began to laugh, he had been bested by a rogue pilot, who happened to be an ESPER. "That's good, kid!" he smiled and picked up the chair, "A true ESPER move at that. No wonder you are going to be stationed on Pluto."

At the home of Tubi Mariner the atmosphere was quite. On the patio sat a small feminine figure perched on a lawn chair. The view she had spanned over the city of Tokyo, a vast city of lights and sounds. Her mind was lost in thoughts of her father and her two friends, all were gone. Lisa was now alone and even that was going to change. On the wooden deck of her patio rested a piece of paper.

Dear Miss Lisa Mariner,

We regret to inform you that the Scouter Calisto has been declared missing. The UEU has deployed the Heavy Battle Cruiser Ironside to locate your father's ship. On behalf of the UEU and RLF you have our sympathy.

General Petri

With the letter and her two friends leaving, Lisa had only one choice. Admiral Hogun had offered to send her to the UEU *Katana* Fleet stationed in the Aries System. Out there she could blow off steam while continuing being a pilot. The *Katana* Fleet was widely known for their efforts in keeping MORDUM terrorists at bay. The officer in charge was Admiral Lain, a veteran of the second great war against MORDUM. He was obsessed with hunting down all the MORDUM soldiers and ships and killing them. His troops and pilots were dedicated and loved combat, Lisa would be at home.

Lisa stood up and went inside, closing the sliding glass door behind her. She walked over to the communication screen and punched in Admiral Hogun's number. There were a few beeps and then the image of the Admiral appeared.

"Hello, Lisa." the Admiral smiled as he set his pen down.

"I want to go to the *Katana* fleet." Lisa said, her voice sounding shaky.

"Ok then," Hogun typed away at his desk computer pad, "go to the shuttle station there in Tokyo and I'll meet you there. Pack lightly and I'll have your orders."

"Thank you." Lisa bowed and shut off the screen.

The Tokyo Shuttle Port was busy as young officers and soldiers said goodbye to their parents, lovers, and children. Lisa felt so awkward standing alone, but then a familiar voice called out. "Lisa, over here!" Admiral Hogun emerged from the crowd along with two other men. One was a tall African man wearing a UEU pilot uniform and the other was a Russian man wearing RLF combat fatigues. They all approached Lisa and Admiral Hogun introduced them. "This is Major Thomas, he'll be your shuttle pilot to the fleet." Thomas reached out and shook Lisa's hand.

"This is Lt. Chekov, he's on his way to the fleet as well."

"Nice to meet you comrade Mariner." Chekov shook her hand as well.

"It's an honor to be the man who gets to fly Captain Mariner's daughter out to the *Katana* Fleet." Thomas looked at Admiral Hogun, awaiting orders.

"Well take care, Lisa. Send me a message on your free time. Take care of her, major." with that Hogun nodded and the three left for the shuttle.

The UEU shuttle was sleek and very high tech. Lisa was amazed by the size of it, only because it had a fold system built into it. There was a lift that took them to the main airlock and from there they put on their flight suits. Lt. Chekov smiled and put a stick of gum in his mouth. Thomas laughed and the crazy Russian chomped away, Lisa just looked on as he made goofy faces. Once the suits were on the three boarded the shuttle and took their places.

Major Thomas took the pilot's seat and strapped himself in while Lisa and Chekov sat in the two passenger seats behind him. "Are we all set?" the major asked as he fired up the engines.

"Yes." the two passengers replied and they both closed their eyes.

"This is UEU shuttle *Spearhead* requesting permission to launch." Thomas paused.

"Permission granted and have a good trip." the launch officer replied.

"Here we go!" Thomas hit the accelerator and the shuttle moved forward.

It was only a matter of seconds before the *Spearhead* was up in the air and gaining altitude. As it breached the cloud cover they pilot could see the blackness of space. Lisa and Chekov were pinned to their seats, clenching their teeth as they entered zero gravity. The shuttle shook for a few seconds and then went steady. In the distance they could see the space dock with a damaged medium battleship in the repair bay. The shuttle zoomed by and headed out to the moon.

"Admiral," the navigation officer onboard the *Ironside* called out, "we are at the drop off point for Mr. Hogun. He is ready in the shuttle bay."

"Good," Tanaka was relieved to get the ESPER off his ship, even if it was the son of his friend Admiral Hogun, "launch shuttle."

"Yes, sir." the officer passed the word to the shuttle.

"All set?" the shuttle pilot asked as he prepared to launch.

Brad checked his buckle and nodded, the hanger bay doors slid open. The shuttle took off and flew out into space. Brad could see the RLF factory, a large industrial space station located in the orbit of Pluto. The rocky planet loomed behind the station like a god over a mortal. The surface was littered with industrial buildings and test facilities. The RLF factory was the most important key to the UEU space might. It was here that the mechanized forces were built along with the Stingray fighters. There were also many hidden secrets on Pluto as well, for on the far side of the planet was a massive transmitter and receiver.

As the shuttle drew closer a squadron of Stingrays approached to escort Brad to his new home. This wasn't the first time Brad had been to Pluto, however, for it was here where he designed and built his Specter fighter. He knew most of the research staff already and they were looking forward to having him back.

The shuttle landed on one of the surface pads and the extended auto airlock of the factory hooked up with the shuttle. When the door opened Brad was greeted by Doctor Franklin, a RLF researcher. " Welcome back Mr. Hogun."

" Thanks, I am ready to get to work." Brad chuckled and the two men walked off.

The *Ironside* sat in orbit around Pluto, Admiral Tanaka just stared at the whole scene. On the corner of the monitor he could see the shuttle returning. The navigator started to set the new course to the hyper space jump point. The communication's officer got the message that the shuttle was in and turned to Tanaka.

" The shuttle is in, sir." he said, then went back to his job of monitoring messages.

" Excellent, take us out of here." Tanaka ordered and spun his chair around to face his science officer. " I want all the info on the system the *Calisto* was in. Have the Master of Arms get the Banshees ready and have him brief Shock Team 3. Also get the Bulldogs and Stingray commanders ready as well. I don't want to get caught with my pants down."

" Do you think that they got attacked by MORDUM?" the science officer asked.

" The system is too far out for any of their ships," Tanaka explained," so I doubt that they'd be out there. I am worried about what they might have run into. The only ship to ever enter that sector was a automated jump point set-up ship."

" Great." the science officer frowned.

" We are at the jump point, sir." the navigator announced.

There on the main screen was the hyper space jump beacon. The crew of the *Ironside* took their places and prepared for the jump. Tanaka turned his chair forward and clenched the arms.

" Ready, set, go!" he ordered.

" Engaging jump drive!" the navigator activated the system.

The ship pulled forward and its' engines glowed bright red. Then as if space had opened up and swallowed it, the *Ironside* jumped into hyper space. There was a bright swirl of light around it and then it faded when the ship was completely gone.

Chapter Three Advanced Actions

Part One MORDUM Attack

The *Spearhead* had reached Jupiter in matter of hours, the massive dead star was surrounded by small asteroids. It was the only place the UEU hadn't colonized or patrolled due to the heavy damage that the rocks caused to their ships. Even with current shields and fire power, it seemed like a waste of man power to clear out this area of space. It also hid the MORDUM forces, a once powerful organization, it was dwindled down to almost nothing by the last UEU war.

" That's a lot of rocks." Lisa said as she admired the view from her seat.

" Yes, many big pebbles." the Russian chuckled and went back to reading his adult magazine her had brought with him.

" Too many places for a MORDUM strike force to hide." the African checked his sensors carefully.

As Lisa looked at the asteroid field she noticed several small objects zig zagging around. Quickly she turned the chair to the control panel next to her and looked at the sensor display. There was nothing, but the object were getting closer now. " Thomas, what are those?" she pointed to the objects.

" Those are...." he paused, took a deep breath and screamed," YIKES! MORDUM fighters!"

" I knew I should have taken a RLF flight instead." Chekov slapped his palm against his forehead.

" Can we outrun them?" Lisa asked as she strapped herself in tight.

" The *Spearhead* is fast, but not that fast!" Major Thomas activated the defensive shields and clicked on the boosters.

The shuttle began to accelerate past the asteroid field, but the MORDUM's Wasp fighters caught up in seconds. Wasp fighters were modified versions of the UEU's Sting fighters used during the first war. They were fast and deadly, able to still out maneuver the Stingray, which made them more than formidable. In combat, they could take down a medium battle cruiser in a matter of minutes. Shuttle, wasp, shuttle, wasp, you do the math.

" Hang on," Thomas banked left and then right as the first barrage of laser fire shot past them," this is going to be a tough one. They can out fly us, out gun us, and defiantly kill us!"

A wasp cut in front of the shuttle and fired across it's nose. The *Spearhead* shook as the beam bounced off its' shields. The other fighters covered both flanks and the rear, leaving the shuttle trapped.

" Surrender in the name of MORDUM." a voice came across the com-system.

" I still have one more trick." Thomas reached over to a red box and pushed the button under it. The box opened revealing a switch that read ' for emergencies only ' and the major hit it.

Outside, the wasps waited for a response. Then without warning, the *Spearhead's* engines fired and forced the shuttle through the blockade. One of the wasp fighters tried to get in front of it, but was no match against its' shields. There was a small explosion as the wasp's wing snapped under the pressure of the shuttles hit. The other fighters moved quickly out of the way and took up new positions. Their beam cannons locked onto the shuttle and fired! The first strike bounced off the shields, but the next few hits penetrated them.

Inside the *Spearhead*, the crew was getting knocked around. The main controls lit up like Christmas tree lights and Thomas jumped up from his seat and ran to the back. Lisa and Chekov followed quickly as the pilot went into the storage bay. When they entered, the major was putting on his ceramic body armor. He looked at them and grabbed another suit out of the locker and tossed it to the Russian.

" Put this on!" Thomas continued with his. " They'll be hauling the shuttle to one of their salvage ships. We stand a better chance taking their ship."

" What about me?" Lisa asked as Chekov put on his armor.

" You stay here until it is safe." Thomas reached in the locker and pulled out a small pistol and handed it to her.

" Oh good, now I have a gun. I'd rather be on the front with you two!" Lisa pushed Chekov out of her way as she stormed back to the bridge.

" I think you should have let her go with us, comrade Thomas." Chekov looked at the major and shook his head.

" She does have some spunk, but I've never been in close combat with a MORDUM soldier." Thomas pulled out an assault rifle and slapped an energy clip into it.

" They are horrible to look at, but easy to kill." the Russian opened up his private locker and pulled out a vibro combat knife and slipped it into his leg sheath.

Lisa stood on the bridge and looked out the front window as a MORDUM salvage ship appeared. It was almost like a giant saucer with a mouth and it was painted black. On one side there was the MORDUM symbol. The sight of the ship made Lisa's heart beat faster and her hands began to sweat.

" I think we are about to have company." Chekov pointed at the cargo bay door as it began to spark.

"Take cover, we'll hit them when they board." Thomas ducked behind a crate and gripped his rifle tight.

The door let out a heavy screech as it slid forward and then slammed into the deck. The raiding party consisted of four MORDUM troops, each wearing the traditional uniforms of the terrorist organization. They each carried older version's of the RLF's energy assault rifle and also had breathing packs.

" Fan out and find the crew!" the first terrorist shouted as he stepped across the thresh hold.

The second man didn't have time to make it through the door. Thomas popped up from behind the crate and sprayed down the leader. Energy bolts burned into his uniform and flesh, bones didn't break, but vaporized instead. The other men dove for cover as their leader fell to the ground. One of them got bold an returned fire causing energy beams to ricochet in the cargo hold.

Thomas looked over to Chekov's position, but the Russian wasn't there! A grim feeling sunk into his chest and the African rolled to the left and took a blank shot that flew into the MORDUM ship. More enemy shots hit the crate, this time getting closer to the pilot. " You'll never take this ship!"

" We'll not only take it, but we'll skin you alive!" the second terrorist screamed as he jumped up to fire another round.

" No, no, no , no!" the man's eyes began to bulge and blood poured from his mouth.

Chekov drove the vibro-blade deep into the man's back. The spinal cord split vertically as the Russian brought the blade up and to the base of the neck. "No skinning allowed you silly terrorist!" Chekov laughed as he severed the head from the body.

"Eat this you Communist!" the fourth man shouted as he fired at Chekov.

The shots bounced off his armor, but he knew that a shot to the head would kill him. In one graceful sweep, Chekov swung down to the deck and picked up the dead man's rifle. The next shots caught the MORDUM agent in the jaw and made a trail straight up to his forehead. Flesh boiled and his eyes exploded, the veins were too burnt to bleed.

The last of the terrorists ran for the door, but was cut down by both Thomas and Chekov. The two men ran onto the MORDUM ship and mowed down the engineer who was on hand. Chekov looked around, they were in a salvage bay and there were only a few MORDUM troops in sight.

"Now what?" the Russian took a deep breath as the soldiers drew closer.

"This ship looks seriously undermanned." Thomas turned and fired several shots at the oncoming men. "If we could make it to the bridge I bet we could take this thing to UEU's security post nearby."

"That is a longshot, this ship is huge. There must be a large crew." Chekov joined the African and poured down barrage.

"Freeze!" a voice yelled from behind. "Drop your weapons!"

ZAP!

There was a clang on the deck and a thud. The two men turned around and standing there was Lisa with her pistol in hand. On the deck in front of her, a MORDUM soldier with a blast mark in the back of his skull. "Get me out of here sometime this week gentlemen." she said as she fired past them. There was another thud as one of the other soldiers took a hit to the face.

"Damn you are good, Ms. Mariner!" Thomas spun around and let off a burst that dropped two more terrorists.

"I think it would be a good idea to get out of here now." Chekov took aim and fired a shot into one of the refueling lines. There was a massive explosion that sent the rest of the troops to the ground.

"Why did you do that?" Lisa pushed the Russian as they ran for the lift that led to the bridge.

"Good diversion." Chekov laughed.

"Diversion, the ship's on fire!" Thomas screamed in anger.

The heat began to build in the cargo hold of the salvage ship. Pilots scrambled to abandon ship and the crew headed for the escape pods. There was a muffled boom and the ship shook violently. Chekov grabbed Lisa and Thomas by the arm and pulled them to the side of the lift.

"Escape pod, see." he smiled as he pushed the open button.

"I get it now!" Thomas yanked the girl into the pod and Chekov sealed the door.

"Hang on Kiddies!" Chekov laughed as the pod launched out of the MORDUM salvage ship and into the darkness of space.

UEU Security Station Delta was having one of its usual non-war time days. MORDUM hadn't made a move in a while and there wasn't any GCC to harass. The pilots of the Broken Cow squadron were getting bored with their tour. Each day they would go out and patrol, shooting rocks for kicks. The BC's consisted of 35 Stingrays, all fully equipped to handle medium battle ships or anything smaller. Today they were patrolling space near the asteroid belt. It was a day for blasting rocks again or was it?

"This is S23," a voice over the comlink sounded so excited, "I have a rock in my sights. Firing HiVoc2! Missile away!"

The sound of several pilots laughing replied to S23's joke. They watched as the missile went into the darkness. "Great shot!" one of the pilots checked his scanner, "it might hit something."

KA-BOOM!

A blinding flash of light consumed the Stingrays and the asteroid field blew apart. Stray rocks bounced off the fighter's shields as the pilots tried to gain control. "What did you hit?!" S30 screamed as his fighter stabilized.

"I'm picking up multiple escape pods from the area of the explosion!" S12 scanner's went wild with blips.

"You hit a ship!" S8 shouted as he kicked in his thrusters to get a better look at the explosion site.

"I hope it wasn't civilian or we'll all fry!" S13 became very nervous.

"The pods ID as MORDUM salvage pods, but I'm picking up a UEU and RLF life ID from one of them." S12 reported as he joined S8 in investigating the area.

The space around the explosion area was littered with debris and rocks. There were several escape pods adrift, their beacon lights blinking. The Stingrays maneuvered through the mess making sure not to hit a pod.

"Wow! Remind me to thank the man who invented the HiVocs." S7 laughed and pulled up next to the pod with the RLF and UEU life ID.

Inside the pod were three figures, two men and a girl. The men were garbed in ceramic armor while the girl just had a flight suit. They were all unconscious, but alive and well.

"I've got them and they look like they've seen some action. They're ours all right." S7 shifted his stingray to warrior mode and grabbed onto the pod.

Deep Space Allies Starring Brad Hogun

It was Brad's first day back at the Pluto research station and he was hard at work. At 0630 he was woken up by Doctor Williams who wanted the telemechanic to inspect the new design for the Bulldog battle mecha. What Brad thought would be a few hour inspection turned out to be an all day adventure.

"I've never seen a design like this before," Brad looked over the blue prints and made eye contact with Dr. Williams, "it's almost human in look but the weapons and armor appear to be fit for a giant."

"Yes, it is," Herbert smiled and flipped the page, "it's the most efficient system yet if I might add."

"Where did you dream this up? From old Stingray designs or from the old RLF battle robots?" Brad picked up his mug and sipped his steaming hot coco.

Dr. Williams went silent for a moment and gave the pilot an odd look like he was hiding something. "Yes, I used the old designs for the RLF Bulldog and borrowed from the Stingray weapons systems. Not very original, huh?"

"It will work, but who is gonna pilot this thing?" Brad smiled and turned to another page.

"No one will have to," Herbert pointed to the cockpit area of the mecha, "it has an onboard battle computer which thinks like a human. It will pilot itself, all the human will have to do is make sure all systems are go."

"It might help if the RLF has a computer that smart." Brad chuckled and finished his drink.

"We do," the doctor turned and pointed at his lab's computer, "Alpha will be the pilot program and onboard computer."

Lights flickered and the monitor activated, there was a moment of silence then a voice.

"Greetings, I am Alpha, a fully sentient computer able to handle many tasks. My primary function is to operate this station." it's electronic voice hummed.

"Funny doctor, but he's only a computer, watch." Brad closed his eyes.

Reaching into the system, accessing data, what is this, not part of normal RLF system, never seen anything like this before, danger alien intelligence present, acquire humans to study, transmit, transmit, transmit....

"Enough!" Dr. Williams pushed Brad back causing him to loose contact with Alpha.

"What in God's name is that thing!" Major Hogun's eyes had begun to water and his head was pounding.

"Get out of here now!" the doctor screamed as he flung papers at the young man.

Brad left the lab and headed to the medical bay to get his head checked. On the way there he passed an observation window, outside four light cruisers could be seen taking on cargo. Men in space suits worked on outer defenses. It was like they were preparing for a war, yet there wasn't one unless you count MORDUM.

Meanwhile in the communications department another mystery was beginning.

"Captain, I am picking up that signal again coming from the outer region." an ensign said quickly as he began to decode it.

"What is it saying?" Captain Dunkin walked over and watched as the signal faded once again.

"It's gone, sir. The computer can't decipher the transmission and all we get for origin is the outer region near the hyper jump point where the *Calisto* was lost."

"Alpha, what is the problem?" Dunkin shouted to the computer.

"Nothing captain, all systems are functional. Suggest further investigations into signal as soon as possible." the computer responded.

"Sounds like a plan." Dunkin turned to his second in command. "I want a full security sweep of the station. I do want the stub testing to continue. Have Major Hogun report to the stub bays as soon as possible."

"Yes, sir." Lt. Packard saluted and left the command area.

Meanwhile in the medical bay Brad was applying a pack of ice to his temple.

"Have you ever experienced a head ache this bad before?" the doctor asked.

"No," Brad shook his head, the pounding started back up again from the movement,

“not once have I experienced something this bad. It was when I linked up with Alpha, there was something not right in his system.”

“Alpha is the greatest computer ever designed by the RLF.” the doctor replied as he ran a med scan of the young telemechanic.

“He may be great, but I think he has a design flaw or something worse.” Major Hogun closed his eyes and tried to clear his thoughts. “How long have we been receiving signals from the outer region?”

“I’m not sure,” the doctor looked at Brad for a second and put his finger on his chin in thought, “but I think the first time was about five months ago. It was about the same time we activated Alpha. There were some signals before that, but Captain Dunkin wouldn’t give us specifics.”

“Isn’t it odd that Alpha and all the new mecha designs came after the signals became constant?” Brad slowly let his eyelids rise.

“That is a good point.” the doctor smiled.

“Who is in charge of extraterrestrial affairs here on Pluto?” Brad stood up and felt a swift flow of blood through his brain.

“Doctor Williams.” the doctor started to read the medical scan.

“He’s also the one who gave Alpha the new design.” Brad’s mind filled with ungodly thoughts.

Doctor Williams shut off his computer and slid his chair back. He took a deep breath of satisfaction and smiled. “We did good today Alpha, soon the Bulldogs will be ready.”

“Yes Doctor,” Alpha replied in his electric voice, “are you not concerned about Major Hogun? He was able to access the information on my homeworld’s transmissions to this planet.”

“Even if he learned the truth,” Herbert smiled a big grin, “I doubt he would be a threat. His father is a well known admiral and I think when all the truth comes out, there will be major change.”

“We must finish the new designs quickly.” Alpha sounded almost urgent. “The Xmorph threat is coming closer to your space. It is possible they have already taken one world. Your government has dispatched the *Ironside* to the outer region to investigate rumors.”

“Alpha,” Herbert yelled, “we will be ok, so stop whining! You sound more human everyday and I’m beginning to wonder if your entire race is like this.”

Just then there was a crackling sound from outside the lab. A second later there was a loud thud against the wall and a screeching sound of metal on metal.

“What was that?” Dr. Williams stood up.

The lab door opened and the hallway was empty. At closer look, Herbert saw a man laying on the ground, smoke pouring up from his chest. The doctor’s eyes grew wide and he reached for his communicator. His vision blurred for a moment as a figure began to seemingly materialize out of thin air.

“Who the hell!?” Herbert shouted at the figure who was garbed in a black jumpsuit with a black yet reflective face plate.

On the man’s right arm was a symbol made up of a pair of bat wings with a dagger for a body. In one hand was a strange pistol that had apparently been fired only seconds ago. The only sound he made was through his breathing apparatus.

“Oh my god!” it was at that instant Doctor Herbert Williams knew who this man was, or at least what he was. A feeling of utter hopelessness filled the old man and then his chest began to spasm. His heart began to race and his pulse jumped, there was stabbing pain and then faintness.

Herbert choked as his heart began to stop, he was having a heart attack.

“Consider this a mercy kill old man.” the masked man whispered as he fired his weapon.

There was a purple and green blast from the weapon which struck Dr. Williams in the chest and hands which were holding himself. The old man snapped back as his flesh peeled from his decrepit hands. He gasped for air only for a moment and then lay still on the floor.

“Intruder in Dr. Williams’ lab!” Alpha’s voice echoed throughout the base.

“As for you.” the assassin turned his attention to Alpha’s main computer bank which was housed in Williams’ lab. He raised his pistol and fired. There was a thunderous crackle and the computer began to spark.

As the first guard reached the lab he saw the body of his fallen comrade. Quickly he drew his beam pistol and began to survey the scene. His eyes caught a quick glance of a figure exiting the lab. “Freeze!” the guard shouted and was answered by a purple and green flash of a weapon.

The shot just missed the guard who dropped to the floor. The guard went to return fire but the man was gone. Other guards arrived to see smoke pouring out of the lab. Quickly one man activated the fire extinguisher system and entered the room.

“The fire is under control,” the guard shouted, “but we’ve got a body in here!”

“Captain Dunkin,” the communications officer shouted, “we’ve got a fire in Dr. Williams’ lab and there are reports of weapons fire!”

“Sound the alarms, find out what’s going on down there!” Dunkin shouted as he ran from the control room. “Son of a bitch, I should have known this week was going to easy!” Captain Randolph Dunkin had been through a nice week of no incidents and he liked it that way. As the commanding officer of the Pluto facility he was in charge of a mass fleet of new mecha and in command of any UEU fleet activity in the area. This was his 8th command, his last one getting nuked by a MORDUM attack causing him to lose a planet defense grid. The UEU decided to send him to Pluto, a place where he would be less likely to be attacked.

Dunkin arrived to see a medical team pulling the body of the late Dr. Williams from the lab. Another body bag was on the floor just outside. There was a strange smell of plasma energy and burnt flesh roaming the air. The captain glanced around for a second and then grabbed a passing medic. “What happened here, son?”

“It looks like somebody with ionic beam pistol had some fun and killed a guard and Dr. Williams.” the medic replied.

An ionic beam pistol, a weapon banned by the UEU and RLF. It was capable of burning through ceramic armor and eating flesh like tissue paper to a match. “A MORDUM attack?” Dunkin asked, but was cut off by his head of security.

“Not MORDUM,” Lt. Young opened his hand, “this was a pro that did this. They even fried Alpha’s mainframe, with the same weapon that killed the doctor and the guard. The thing I don’t get is that we couldn’t find anything on the cameras in the lab.”

“Could they have been cloaked?” Dunkin asked as he inspected a piece of ionized metal that rested in Young’s hand.

“It looks like it could be.” Young replied and looked around. “Shadow Guard, sir.”

“But why? What are we doing here that would warrant a Shadow Guard attack?” Cpt Dunkin moved closer to Young to conceal the conversation.

“I don’t know, but we had better make sure that there is no one else on this guys hit list.” Young paused for a second and thought.

“That new kid, Hogun!” there was a rush of blood into the officer’s head.

“I’ll head down to the stub bay and grab him!” Young ran for the stub bay.

STUBs, Secondary Tactical Urban Bots, the newest in RLF mecha and adaptable for space use. These robots were half the size of Bulldogs and could be armed with rail guns or beam weapons. Some were even able to use melee weapons like beam swords and vibro blades.

Brad entered the bay only seconds before the alarms went off. His head thudded from the constant howl, but he managed to block most of it out.

“You’re late Hogun,” the instructor shouted, a mean old sergeant from one of the colony wars. “get your ass in the stub now!”

“What about the alarm!” Brad shouted, but the old man pointed with quickly at the stub.

“Alarms are for security, we have a training run to do!” the old man shouted.

Brad climbed up the ladder and jumped into the cockpit of the stub. The pilot area was cramped, but the stub was easy to pilot. Brad used his telemechanics to activate his stub, the view screen switched on and he was able to see the launch bay. An officer entered the bay and signaled Brad to get out of the stub.

“Major Hogun,” Lt. Young shouted, “I need you to come with me!”

“Lieutenant,” the instructor screamed across the com-link, “we are getting ready to do a training mission.”

“New orders Forest! The skipper wants Hogun ASAP!” Young shouted back.

One of the stubs stepped forward, breaking rank with the other pilots. “Get back in rank!” Forest shouted, but the stub ignored his order.

Brad watched as the unruly stub raised its rail gun. There was a pause and then Brad felt something wrong with the stub. “He’s armed his weapon! Look out!”

The warning call came too late as the stub quickly turned towards the other mechs. There was a loud buzzing sound as the rail gun fired. Two stubs took direct hits to their pilot’s compartments, causing a power overload. Lt. Young ran for cover as the stub turned its attention to him. Forest powered up his stub and slammed into the enemy mech. The two mechs made a tremendous clang and dropped to the deck.

“Prepare to die old man!” the enemy pilot threw Forest into a nearby stub.

“I don’t think so!” Brad leapt into the air and kicked the enemy stub in the chest.

“Brave words boy, but lets take this to a different battle ground!” the enemy pilot took aim at the air lock with the rail gun and pumped it full of holes.

Lt. Young tired to anchor himself down, but he was too late. There was a heavy whooshing sound and the vacuum of space pulled him out. Forest tried to grab him, but was stopped by a barrage of gun fire.

“ You son of a” Forest was cut off as his stub exploded, the bay ripped wide open sucking the rest of the stubs out into space.

“ This is not good at all.” Brad grabbed a pylon and held fast as the other stubs flew out into the construction field.

“ Don’t worry,” the enemy pilot radioed, “ I will kill you quickly! Just like that stupid doctor, you will die on your knees!”

“ What the hell are you talking about?” Brad was lost, with no idea who the attacker was.

“ Oh,” the pilot sounded surprised, “ you didn’t hear about poor Dr. Williams, he started to die before I shot him. It was truly pathetic I think. Ha ha ha ha!”

“ Why would you kill Herbert?” Brad was in shock, he never liked Dr. Williams, but to kill the man, that was inhuman.

“ For the same reason I’ll kill you, to preserve the humankind!” the pilot chuckled.

“ We’ll see about that you bastard!” Brad shouted and pushed off into the construction field.

Shuttle pilots were quickly picking up their men as the two stubs entered the construction area. Two stingrays took up position outside the filed just in case the battle headed towards the living section of the base.

“ Are you ready to die Mr. Hogun?” the pilot laughed.

“ Eat shit!” Brad maneuvered behind a empty barge and grabbed a steel beam.

“ Oh, ancient combat, so be it!” the pilot let go of his rail gun and let it drift away from him. Not caring for what he damaged, the pilot ripped a pylon apart in order to use it as a club.

“ Let us do battle!”

Captain Dunkin had made his way back to the control room. He couldn’t believe his luck today, first a murder and now an explosion in the stub bay that killed his security officer. “ What the hell is going on out there?!”

“ It appears our assassin has taken a stub and is about to kill Major Hogun!” the communication officer replied.

“ Get those two stingrays in there and kill that son of a bitch!” Dunkin screamed.

“ Sir, the enemy pilot wishes to have a duel with Major Hogun.” there was a pause.

“ Take them both out! Blast them before they damage the base!” Dunkin scowled at the screen.

“ But sir!” the communications officer protested. “ You can’t do that!”

“ That’s an order!” Dunkin grabbed the com-link from the officer. “ This is Captain Dunkin, I want those two stubs destroyed before they do any damage to the construction sites!”

“ This is S15, that is a no go sir,” a pilot responded “ one of our own is out there.”

“ If you don’t shoot those two stubs down, I will have you court marshaled!” Dunkin screamed.

“ What the hell?!” Brad used his thrusters to get him behind the barge he was near.

“ Your skipper is quite the man.” the enemy laughed “ Willing to kill one of his own. To think, they call me a killer!”

Captain Dunkin’s eyes became bloodshot and his brow poured with sweat. The communications officer got up and moved away from his commanding officer. “ Sir, you don’t look so good, maybe you.....”

There was a flash of light and the rest of the command staff watched in horror as Capt. Dunkin gunned down the communications officer. The two guards in the room drew their weapons and took aim at their mad leader.

“ Drop the pistol, sir!” one guard shouted in a heavy voice.

“ Drop my weapon, hit me if you can son!” at that moment there was a blur that covered the captain and he vanished.

“ Shadow Guard!” the tactical officer screamed, but before he could raise the alarm a low hum started and his throat opened up.

“ Where did he go?” the other guard shouted as the lights went off.

“ Over here!” a blast of light burned into the one guard’s armor, as the other turned around.

“ Sucker!” a voice came from the shadows.

The command room door slide open and Captain Dunkin ran in with several shock troopers. “ Over there! FIRE!”

The shock troopers didn’t bother to aim, instead they lit up the entire corner of the command room. The mysterious man appeared as his cloaking generator got hit by one shot.

Standing there was a man in a black jumpsuit and wearing a black reflective mask. The other shots burned through his legs leaving him crippled on the floor.

“ You son of a bitch!” the real Captain Dunkin shouted as he ran up to the imposter.

“ Who sent you?!”

“ Wouldn’t you like to know?” the man sputtered, as blood ran from his mask.

“ Sir, the enemy stub is heading for the observation window!” one of the shock troopers pointed to the window.

“ Brad,” Dunkin screamed “ if you can here me stop him before he kills us all!”

“ I’m on it, sir!” Brad jumped into action and headed for the enemy stub who was now halfway to the window.

The stingrays tried to get a shot off, but the stub was between them and the observation window. A miss would do as much damage as the stub would. Brad’s stub reached back with the beam it had taken and threw it at the enemy mecha. The iron beam impaled the mecha from behind, sparks flew and it began to twitch.

“ Don’t think it’s that easy, Captain Dunkin.” the assassin coughed up more blood. “ The stub is being piloted by a computer and there is a warp bomb inside of it.”

“ Jesus christ!” Dunkin’s eyes lit up and he looked out at the oncoming mecha. “ Brad get out of here, there is a warp bomb in that thing!”

“ My god!” Brad had heard of the warp bomb, able to open up warp space and suck things into it like a black hole. The UEU had banned it centuries ago, but it seems that their Shadow Guard had kept producing them. *I must reach into the machine, through space until I can feel it. There, I have it. So many encryptions that it would be too late to by the time I broke through. I have to move it into open space and try to disarm it there.* Brad’s stub tackled the mecha from behind and headed for open space. “ I’ll take him to the jump point, so make sure it’s open when I get there!”

“ S15,” Captain Dunkin ordered quickly, “ get out there and open that gate!”

“I’m on it!” the stingray transformed back into its fighter mode and sped off to the jump point. The pilot watched as he passed Brad and the struggling stub that he was carrying out.

“ Looks like your plan isn’t going to work.” Dunkin looked down on the wounded man.

“ It already has!” he coughed his last cough and a high pitched whine started to sound.

The command staff and shock trooper covered their ears. On the Shadow Guard’s wrist was a com-link that was blinking red. Captain Dunkin had seen it before, a small fusion bomb used in case a Shadow Guard had been captured or mortally wounded.

“ Get out of my way, sir!” a shock trooper pushed through and flopped the dead man over his shoulder, bolting from the room. The command staff ducked for cover as the device went off.

The whole base shook as the fusion bomb ripped through the hull. Alarms sounded and doors sealed. The event would keep anyone from witnessing the climax near the jump point.

“ It is almost open, Brad!” S15 finished his calculations and a massive swirl of multiple colors exploded all around the fighter. “ There, go for it!”

“ Get out of here, it’s up to me now!” Brad reached back into the enemy computer. *Activate thrusters and navigate into the jump point.* Nothing. *Navigate into the jump point!*

The computer didn’t respond except with a mechanical voice. “ Five seconds until detonation.”

“ NO! At this range it will tear into Pluto!” Brad’s stub clenched onto the metal beam that was stuck in the mecha’s back. Quickly he threw it into the jump point, then the stub exploded in a ball of orange flame. Brad was blinded as the warp bomb illuminated the entire area around Pluto. “ ARRRGGGHHHH!” Brad cried out as he put his hands over his eyes.

S15 watched as the jump point began to close in on the warp field created by the bomb.

“ Brad get out of there!” the pilot shouted into his com system.

“ ZZZZZZZZZZZ.....blinded.....can’t...ZZZZZZZZZ” Brad’s transmission ended as the jump point close completely, sucking Brad Hogun into oblivion.

A Terrible Tale Starring Suicide

In the outer reaches of the Aries system lies the planet Dyphin, a small world covered in small forests and a few oceans. It has moderate temperatures and rainfall that comes and goes much like Earth’s. There are 4 seasons and two polar regions, which unlike most planets actually support plant life. The population is mostly made up of farmers and foresters, there are a few GCC civilians and many UEU citizens. There is little military support on a world like this and the local government likes it that way. Cargo ships come and go as do people on the planet.

The local hyperspace jump point was always busy and today was no different. Several freighters and a few RLF battle cruisers had passed through in just the first half of the day. As the afternoon progressed traffic would pick up even more.

Onboard the UEU freighter *Samson* the crew was preparing for a deadly mission. One that would rock the UEU and the GCC to the core. The freighter had left Earth a week ago and hadn't stopped at any of the usual ports. Even communications had been limited to a few requests to use jump points. When the *Samson* came out of hyperspace it's battered hull sent shivers down the spines of the Stingray patrol squad that passed by it. The poor ship had been shot up and hammered by countless space objects.

"Crew of the *Samson*, are you ok?" one of the Stingray pilots radioed as he flew by.

"Affirmative. We are heading for Dyphin for repairs." the pilot of the freighter came back.

"Good luck then." squadron of Stingrays moved on to the next ship.

The freighter pilot took a deep breath and removed his helmet. Mark Redfield had lied before, but to 4 Stingrays who would have blasted him out of the sky if they'd known what he had for cargo. It had been a few months since his trial and Admiral Paqui had offered him freedom in exchange for services as a pilot for a Black Ops mission.

"Was there a problem?" a low toned voice came over the onboard com-system.

"No there wasn't." Mark replied as he moved the *Samson* into orbit around Dyphin. The passengers he had onboard were not the type of people to upset or anger. It was bad enough he had to talk to them, but if they even doubted his loyalty to the UEU they would kill him in a second. Soon it wouldn't matter, they'd be on the planet and he'd be on his way home.

The *Samson* shook as it entered the atmosphere. "Hang on gentlemen, it's gonna be bumpy."

"Silence." Mark was interrupted by one of his secret cargo. "Set us down just outside the first logging community. Once we've unloaded wait for instructions."

"Understood." Mark grumbled as he activated the shadow system on the freighter. The shadow system was developed by the RLF, making anything engulfed by it invisible to scanners.

Mark looked down at the forest and spotted the logging station. It was set above the tree line with a landing pad on the top platform. He could see where trees had been removed by the colonists. It all looked so small and the only clearing was a mile away from the actual destination.

The *Samson's* engines went silent as it glided into the clearing. There was a soft gust of wind as the ship set down and the cargo doors dropped open. A quick blast of steam poured out of the hold and the sounds of metallic footsteps echoed out into the woods. Mark watched as his 'cargo' walked out and mustered outside the *Samson*.

Terror Guard, a name so awful that no one wants to speak it. Each suited in Banshee battle suits, Mk3 rail guns slung, vibro-swords sheathed, and assault pistols holstered. They each had demonic symbols on their shoulders representing their own preferred form of fear. The sergeant was different in that he instead of a vibro-sword, was armed with a vibro-trident. They were the most dreaded genetically engineered warriors in the history of the UEU. Used for the most ruthless attacks and battles, to see a Terror Guard meant that the UEU wanted you dead.

"Man, I pity the terrorists that pissed off the UEU." Mark whispered as he sat back and activated the scanners. If he was going to drop of Terror Guard he was going to see what they were attacking. Yet, there was nothing on the scanner that would indicate MORDUM activity. Not one weapon or defensive network in a 5 mile radius or the ship.

The banshees were running for the first logging station, as fast as lightning they ducked trees and leaped over logs. The sergeant, T1, was in the lead followed by 9 others. His hand shot up and they all stopped and took cover. Ahead was a logging team and a wood transporter working away at a stretch of forest. None of them were armed, except for their vibro-saws and laser cutters.

"Just two more and it's lunch time, Burt." one of the scruffy men laughed as he cut away at a massive tree.

"Sounds good, Marty." Burt wiped the sweat from his forehead, not noticing the figures hiding in the bushes.

"Take aim." T1 ordered and head raised his trident.

The other banshees took aim with their rifles and activated the laser sights. Red dots found their marks on the two foresters and before they knew it....

"Fire!" T1 shouted.

"Fir...." Burt turned as a blast from a rail gun cut through his chest. Bone shattered, veins burst, and blood exploded from his back.

Marty didn't stand a chance either as a shot impacted with his skull sending brain and bone fragments into the tree he was cutting. The other men started to run and the banshees emerged from the woods. T1 threw his trident 40 feet, impaling the supervisor as he picked up his communicator.

T3 and T5 fired at the wood transporter, punching holes in its' body plating. The engines exploded and metal shrapnel rained down on the workers. Screams of terror were drowned out by the banshee's rail guns as they tore up the men. T4 lunged in front of one man who was trying to flee through the woods. The man looked up at the soldier, his jaw dropped and then his head hit a nearby tree. T4 drew his vibro-sword and drove it into the dead man's chest. Another worker tried to fight hitting T8 from behind with a laser cutter, the beam punching a pin sized hole in the banshee armor. The terror guard spun around and drew his assault pistol. A shot rang out and the armor piercing round blasted through the man's forehead and struck another worker behind him. T1 walked over to the supervisor, who was struggling to get the vibro-trident out of his back. He gazed at the banshee sergeant as T1 reached out and tore the weapon from his back. The blood ran off the vibrating spear tips and he shook it. The man on the ground coughed chunks of flesh and blood up. T1 walked away, leaving the man to die a slow death.

" Jesus Christ!" Mark fell out of his chair as he watched on the scanners as 15 living workers dwindled away to none. " Those weren't terrorists they were civilians! On this is not good at all and their heading for the logging station." Mark punched up the stats on the station.

" 23 families, not one suspected MORDUM agent in the whole bunch. Only a few GCC missionaries, but nothing to warrant this type of attack. Admiral Paqui is mad to authorize this type of attack on civilians. I've got to do something!"

The terror guard wasted no time in progressing to the logging station. " Use only assault pistols and vibro-weapons, rail guns will not be needed. Kill all targets and anyone that gets in your way."

" We obey." they all said in chorus as they slung their rifles and drew their vibro-swords.

" One last thing, no witnesses." T1 smiled while thoughts of mass murder filled his deranged head.

On the outside of the station there were a few workers returning from their shift. Tired and weary they didn't stand a chance against the 10 banshees. There were sounds of hacking and then nothing. T3 ran up the guard post and jumped through the guard house wall with tremendous force. The man standing watch drew his pistol, but T3 backhanded him, breaking his jaw and half his face. The other man outside looked for a second and saw the banshee. That was enough to make him run away. T9 ran from his hiding spot and flew through the air. His foot slammed into the fleeing guards back and shattered the spine.

" Light armor." T9 lifted the guard with one hand and held him up in the air.

" Good, I love an overkill." T2 walked up and punched the man out of T9's hand.

The guard hit the ground and screamed out for help. " We're under attack, help ..."

Crunch, T9 stomped on the man's head and crushed his skull. He looked up and was greeted by 3 men armed with shotguns. The other banshees just stood their as the men approached with their guns drawn.

" You boys have better have a good reason for all this. The UEU has no right to attack us, we work for 'em!" the man in the front shouted as he looked at the corpse of the guard on the ground.

" We do." T1 drew his pistol and shot the man in the head.

The two others fired at T9 and T2, who were jumping to one side. T1 let off two more precise shots that dropped the armed men in a second. " Kill everyone here." T1 ordered as he holstered his pistol.

Mark tried to start the engines of the *Samson*, but all the systems were locked down.

" Dammit! Those bastards, I've got to get in touch with the local military and warn them."

The pilot ran back to the cargo hold and looked around for anything he could use. There were several crates that were open, each looked like they had houses some type of weapons and armor. There was one crate that wasn't open and it was locked. " Ah," Mark smiled as he grabbed his portable tool kit and started taking apart the lock, " looks like they didn't think I was this smart." He worked quickly in case the terror guard returned. They would certainly kill him if they found him messing with their gear.

The lock beeped and the crate opened up, revealing a rocket launcher and several Mk4 anti-mecha rockets. Mark pulled out the weapon and loaded it. The other rockets he put into a backpack and headed out the door of the freighter. The path the Terror Guard took was very clear and Mark could see smoke in the distance. The attack had begun already and hopefully he wouldn't be too late.

Meanwhile at the station the banshees were making quick work of the small security forces. " Fall back," the captain screamed as banshees broke through the defenses, " try to hold them at the launch pad. Get the civilians out of here!"

Women and children fled to the safety of the transport ship while down below their fathers and husbands fought to keep the invaders at bay. It seemed like they would never escape.

T4 could see the group of civilians heading for the ship and started climbing up one of the support beams. One soldier tried to shoot him down, but it was useless. The rounds bounced off his banshee armor and caused a fray of bullets to run wild. The man pulled a grenade, but T2 tackled him and tore his arm off tossing it and the

explosive into a nearby alley. The banshee then punched his fist through the soldier's head and pulled out his brain. The war cry of the terror guards rang like church bells and no one was safe anymore.

Once at the top of the beam, T4 drew his assault pistol and started shooting the women and children. It was no challenge for a soldier of his caliber, but they were still going to die like pigs. For a laugh T4 shot a group of women and children in the legs leaving them screaming in pain on the launch pad. Blood pooled and sprayed on the transport, two security guards ran out and tried to help the wounded, while two others laid down cover fire with their SMG's. Armor piercing rounds ravaged T4's armor and finally made him bleed. The warrior fell to one knee as round after rounds cut into his body. He raised his pistol and fired at one of the security guards, the round smacking his helmet and knocked the man over.

" Eat this you monster!" the other soldier yelled as he fired a grenade from his SMG.

The explosion sent T4 flying backwards and off the landing platform itself. The banshee fell 400 feet to the ground where it smashed on top of a truck, which blew apart from the impact. T4 lay still, impaled by metal from the vehicle. T1 saw the body of T4 and grew enraged with anger and hate. He charged the security position and smashed through their barricade. He grabbed the first man he saw and swept him aside with his trident. The man's neck broke from the impact of the weapon alone and his body went limp.

The other banshees charged ahead screaming their war cry, rail guns cutting down the security forces. T5 used his boosters and launched himself upwards toward the platform while the rest of the terror guard continued their assault below. When he arrived the last of the wounded civilians were being loaded in the transport. The soldier that had cut down T4 spun around and his SMG spat its' armor piercing rounds at the banshee. T5 rolled to one side in a flash as the bullets punched through the armored platform. T5 stood up and raised his gun, there was a flash, then a thud as the shot impacted with the soldier's armor. He looked shocked at first as blood started gushing from the wound and then charged the banshee with the last of his strength. T5 met the man halfway and power punched him with an upper cut. The jaw shattered from the blow and the helmet was flung up into the air.

Looking down on all this was Mark, who was stopped on a hill catching his breath. He pulled out the rocket launcher and looked through the scope. There was a banshee on the platform getting ready to blow apart the transport. " Oh no you don't you monster!" he clicked off the safety and the mini targeter activated. There were a series of beeps and then a hum as the weapon prepared to fire. " Eat this you fucker!" Mark squeezed the trigger and the anti mecha rocket launcher fired.

T1 had finished killing the last of the security guards at that position. He set the bodiless head down and wiped off his bloodied trident. Then he sensed something coming from a distance and looked up. There was a streak of red and an explosion above on the platform were T5 was. The rocket struck T5 in the back and blasted through his armor. His body split in two at first, but then fragmented across the platform.

" Yes!" Mark loaded the next rocket as he watched the transport lift off. " Now to peg those other bastards before they figure me out or find me."

T1 made it to the top and his anger grew even more. T5 had been killed by an anti mecha rocket, a weapon that was not supposed to be at this station. The hit was too precise to be a normal rocket, it had to have been a Shadow Guard weapon. T1 knew who fired the shot and where the weapon came from. The freighter pilot had betrayed him and now he was going to pay.

" The pilot is out there with one of our special toys. Watch your backs and kill him on sight."

The other banshees had reached the top and became just as angered as T1 when they saw T4's remains. Then there was a whistling sound and T1 jumped from the platform. T3 looked up too late as a rocket exploded his helmet sending his body to the ground, headless. The others looked around to find out where the shot came from. T6 fired randomly with his rail gun into the forest in a blank rage. Then there was another explosion as T9's legs were blown off of him by another rocket. The rest of the banshees ran for cover behind some crates that were left behind.

T1 landed on the ground, his jump rockets creating a small dust cloud. He looked around and realized he was outnumbered in his current position. He drew his pistol as several more soldiers emerged from another street. T1 took aim and fired at the first one he saw, the bullet ripping through the man's neck and cutting the spine. The soldier fell to the ground and blood gushed from the wound. The other guards fired at the banshee as another explosion rocked the platform above.

T5 lay on the deck with his armor blasted to pieces. His bloodied body flopped around as he slowly died. T6 glanced out from behind a crate to see if he could spot the shooter. It was a blur to the terror guard as a flash hit him in the face. T2 ducked as T6 exploded backwards and was flung over the edge of the landing platform.

" There he is!" T10 shouted as he ran out from behind his cover charged across the pad.

Mark saw T10 and quickly loaded another rocket. " Come and get me you fuck, I'm gonna blast you apart just like the rest of the others."

T7 joined T10 and they leaped off the platform together, their jump packs activated giving them more distance. Mark targeted between them and fired the rocket. There was a blur of red and then an explosion that sent T10 and T7 falling more than 500 feet to the ground. T10 slammed head first into a tree and snapped his neck. T7 had worse luck falling into a wood stripping machine. The massive jaws crunched the banshee armor in a matter of seconds.

T1 rushed into battle with the last of the guards who was wearing prowler armor. The auto shotgun blasted T1 in the chest and knocked him off his feet. The banshee was beginning to become weak from so many hits. T1 tried to get back up, but the prowler kept hitting him over and over. Then there was a blur and flash of silver. The prowler split in two and blood and organs spilled onto the ground. T2 stepped back and shook his vibro-sword to get the blood off.

T1 stood up slowly gripping his side as his ribs cracked.

"Dammit, where the hell did the other two go? Great, now I have two insane killers mad at me." Mark slung the rocket launcher and headed down the hill to see if he could find the two terror guard.

"Our mission is over," T1 coughed a chunk of blood up and spit it on the body of the prowler," the transport got away and soon the stingray patrol will be here."

"What about the pilot?" T2 asked as he looked around at the destruction.

"We will hunt him like a dog and hang him with his own intestines." T1 smiled at just the thought of it.

"Well if that's the case, you better have a good tailor." Mark knelt down with the launcher pointed in their direction.

"Coward, you strike us from a distance. Where is the glory of that?" T2 shouted as he reached to his pistol.

"Glory, you were killing innocent women and children." Mark clicked off the safety and waited.

"They weren't innocent, they were involved in terrorist activity. The children would have followed in their father's footsteps and the women would keep breeding them." T1 just stood there and watched, waiting for T2 to kill the pilot.

"Great theory, here's mine!" the rocket fired and T2 raised his pistol and took a shot.

The rocket struck T2 in the left shoulder sending him flailing. The shot he fired struck Mark in the chest and knocked him over. He checked the wound and realized the shot was off and had missed his heart. Still the pain was tremendous and he was having a hard time breathing. T1's left side had suffered most of the damage caused by the rocket. Blood ran down his arm and his side. He stood up and took off his helmet, dropping it to his side.

"Don't you guys ever just die?" Mark looked around for a weapon and saw T1's trident laying under some rubble.

"You...cough cough.....are going to die even if I have to kill you in my next life." T1 picked up a pipe off the ground and walked closer.

"Sure, ok, I bet you are." Mark grabbed the weapon and stood up.

Even mortally wounded, T1 was quick striking Mark in the shoulder with the pipe. The pilot fell to the ground from the blow. Swiftly he swung the trident low and cracked T1 in the back of the knees. The terror guard toppled over and stuck out with the pipe on the way down.

Mark rolled out of the way and used the trident as a crutch to help him up.

"You've killed your last civilian. Take some of your own medicine!" Mark drove the trident deep into T1's chest.

The scream T1 made was like no other Mark had heard before. He put his weight down and the spear tips punched all the way through to the ground. Blood rushed from T1's chest and pooled under him. There was finally a moment of silence across the station. Then there was a call for help coming from a pile of rubble. The pilot let go of the trident and walked down the street to where the call was coming from. There was a sound of metal tearing and then a figure emerged.

T4 stood in the middle of the street, a piece of metal hanging out of him and blood running down it. Mark paused and almost wanted to cry at the sight of another terror guard. He scanned the ground and saw a SMG in the hands of one of the dead security guard. Mark picked up the weapon and checked the ammo. T4 just kept walking his way.

"I remember a time when I would just kick the shit out a soldier at the bars. Now it's so different and I really am sick of you guys coming back to life." Mark held tight and fired at T4.

The SMG rounds punched through the banshee and tore deep into T4's body. Yet, he kept walking closer and closer, blood and flesh trailing behind him. Finally, Mark pumped the grenade launcher and lobbed a grenade at the man. The explosion knocked Mark on his ass while T4's arm fell next to him. The body of the terror guard was on three pieces, while his organs lay across the battle field.

" I guess those rumors weren't true about you pricks." Mark stood up weakly, his chest pounding from the gunshot wound, leaving him slightly disoriented.

There was a noise from behind him and something struck him with immense strength. The pilot was dropped to the ground by the blow to his back. He screamed in pain and rolled over to see his attacker. T1 stood there with the trident still sticking in his back. The small spear tips poked from his front and blood was running down his stomach. There was a look of blood lust in his eyes and foam was gushing from his mouth. All Mark could do was lay there paralyzed by the impact of the blow. T1 raised his fists together for one final crushing strike against the man he called traitor.

" Were you looking for us?" a voice interrupted the final silence and T1 glanced back in annoyance.

Standing behind him were four men armed with Mk3 Beam Rifles. They were suited in old style marine armor made of ceramics and mesh material. On their shoulders were skull and crossbones with a lightning bolt through it. Mark looked at them and blacked out from the mass blood loss. Even in darkness the sounds of beam weapons firing burned into his ears and then a heavy weight landing on him.

Part Two The Fate of New Eden

In the outer regions of the known galaxies are the colonies of the Galactic Church of Christ. The few planets they inhabit are encircled by massive energy shields that protect them from attack. One of these planets is New Eden, population 50 million civilians.

It was a bright day on New Eden, it's lush fields rippled in the breeze. The sky was blue and it's two moons hung overhead like pair of eyes. On the surface hundreds gathered for the mass baptism at the great falls. The marbled floor of the lake kept the water clear and shimmering. 100 children stood in a line for the sacred gift.

A man garbed in a fine GCC uniform emerged from a tent near the shore. At his side were two assistants each in robes and wearing rose crowns. " It is a perfect day for this," Garfin Lorn smiled as he raised his bible," and so many bright faces to please."

" It is a glorious day indeed." one of his assistants waved and the mass of followers cheered.

Garfin Lorn was one of the most influential preachers of the GCC. Having started on Earth and leaving during the first outbreak, he became one of the most revered men in the church. He was also one the council that ordered the radical Tarren exiled from the GCC organization. It was a hard choice, but it was for the better of the church. War was never the answer and Tarren was all to ready to cleanse the universe of unbelievers no matter who died.

Garfin stepped up to the speaker and the crowd went silent. " Today is the day where you accept Christ as your savior and Lord. It is a joyous occasion indeed, one that will go down in your memory as a very special moment."

Meanwhile in the city of Joseph, on the other side of the planet a different story was unfolding. In the observatory the telescope focused on the nearby hyper space jump bouy.

" Something is coming through the new jump point." a scientist slid his chair back and turned to his computer.

" Isn't that the new one the *Calisto* just placed?" another man came around the corner.

The GCC had no problem with research and their scientists were treated with much respect. They were garbed in white jumpers with the insignia of the GCC on the shoulder. They are in charge of research and making sure the planetary shield is up and running.

" There isn't anything scheduled to come through." the two men looked at the scanners as the jump point closed.

" What is that!?" one of the men pointed at the screen.

The object was large, the size of a small starship and it resembled the form of a Scouter. Yet, there were masses of tentacles and other organic parts drifting behind it. In the front of the thing was a gaping mouth with mass amounts of teeth.

" I've never seen anything like that in my life." the other man jumped up.

" Yown, what are you doing?" Kilm asked as the his friend ran for the planetary alarm.

" We have to warn Garfin and the others." Yown clicked on his comlink and signaled Garfin's personal guards.

" We don't know what it is. Don't cause a global panic, it might just pass by us." Kilm grabbed the comlink from Yown and tossed it on a nearby desk.

" What if it does? It looks like a giant monster!" Yown shouted at his friend and went over to the monitor.

" If it heads our way we'll sound the alarm. It looks dead and besides no creature could withstand hyper space." Kilm scanned the creature and printed a read-out. " It appears to be organic, very little cell activity and it appears to have suffered hyper genetic acceleration."

" You mean it reacted to being in hyper space." Yown checked the scanners again and turned to Kilm with a puzzled look on his face. " I'm picking up a UEU signal from inside the creature. It's the *Calisto* or at least what's left of it. That thing must have eaten it!"

" I don't think so," Kilm sat down and activated the probe launcher," more like it grew inside the ship and consumed it. As I said, it appears to have hyper evolved from it's exposure to hyper space. I would say that the *Calisto* brought something onboard and it had an unexpected reaction to hyper space."

" Amazing, yet terrible. That means the crew of the *Calisto* is dead?" Yown asked as a chill shot down his spine.

" I don't know, but here it comes!" Kilm activated the global alarm.

Garfin was just finishing up his service when the alarm sounded. The loud whining echoed across the lake and fields. Parents grabbed their children and started to head to the shelters. The two guards unrobed to reveal GCC security armor. The daylight turned to blackness as a huge shadow dwarfed out the sunlight.

"What is that!" Garfin gasped as the alien menace drew closer.

The two guards pushed the preacher towards the hovercraft that was waiting to take him back to the capital city. " We don't know, sir, but we need to get you back to the city now!"

There was a flash in the sky and the global shields activated. The emerald color of the barrier caused the landscape of New Eden to go green. People across the planet ran for cover in preparation for the first attack if any. At the planet's security station there was hustle to prepare ground forces for an attack in case the shields failed. The armed forces of the GCC consisted of just a few militia armed with very conventional weapons.

The space around it was cold and when it regained consciousness the creature was hungry. Ahead was a planet full of life, perfect for consumption. *CONSUME, HUNGER, MINOR RESISTANCE, ENERGY SHIELD DETECTED, DESTROY AND CONSUME.* The tentacles moved forward and a cyclopean eye formed on the under belly. The mouth split open and the teeth chomped as it drew nearer.

" Picking up heavy plasma discharge from the creature." Kilm shouted as he watched the scanner light up.

" It's going to fire at us!" Yown screamed as the first ball of plasma fire shot forth.

The ball of plasma rolled into the planetary shield and exploded. The creature observed no damage to the barrier and paused. Its' eye began to glow and a beam of blue light fired at the shield. The planet shook and the observatory exploded from the power overload.

" What is God's name?" Garfin looked in horror as the control area for the shield collapsed to the ground.

" The planetary shield is going down!" one of his bodyguards shouted as the emerald color shifted.

" Dear God save us!" Garfin cried out as the sky thundered and the clouds atmosphere buckled under the pressure of the energy blasts from space.

The creature's tentacles spread out across the shield and a blue shockwave blasted the energy barrier. There was a sucking sound on the surface of New Eden and then a dead silence. The population knew they were doomed when the sounds of the alien roared across the landscape.

Battle for New Eden

It had only been hours since the alien ship broke through the shields of New Eden and had begun spreading its seed. Garfin Lorn was one of the first to die, his providence was annihilated from the pressure burst of the creature as it landed. On the other side of the planet Janus Ried was preparing a defense plan to drive away the creature and its spawn.

" We must release the crusaders at once!" Janus clenched his fist at the Galactic Church of Christ council.

" We cannot use the crusaders unless we are certain that these things are not going to settle this peacefully." an old man garbed in white robes signed.

" The crusaders are too dangerous to use anyways," another elder interrupted, " the last time we used them they almost killed us all!"

" Don't be a fool! God will show us the way." a younger councilman shouted.

" Fool, God has told me this is the way to stop them!" Janus grinded his teeth and turned to the GCC military advisor.

" Lord Ried is correct, we do need to release the crusaders before those creatures reach us. It is our only chance." the advisor pointed to a holo-map which displayed the pattern of invasion that the creatures were using.

“ This, it’s not right!” the younger man shook his head, the idea of crusaders running amok on New Eden was horrific.

“ I know, let us pray the Lord saves us all.” Janus closed his eyes and began to pray for salvation.

The crusaders, were but mere men, the GCC’s version of terror guard, but programmed to do the work of God himself. Only used once before due to their lack of control, these genetic creations were deadly. What made the GCC so scared of them was the large mecha they piloted. The crusader’s mecha were about fifty tall, made of carapace armor and titanium mesh. They looked almost human, except for spines that protruded from the arms and legs. The weapon that they wielded was even more deadlier, a vibro-sword that was so massive it could cut through hulls of starships. The technology for these war machines was lost by the elders of the GCC and no one knows how to pilot them except for the few crusaders that the GCC had created.

Only used in times of great need, the crusaders had wiped out a whole battalion of RLF bulldogs during the first great push to free all worlds. The battle ended with over a thousand RLF and UEU troops dead, hundreds of bulldogs destroyed and about two dozen stingrays wiped out. The GC had ten crusaders, they were unstoppable. But those were humans that they fought, the alien invaders might not be as easy.

Deep in the GCC military base two men approached a massive door with carvings of Jesus and angels around him, hovering above an army of Greeks. The soldiers were being blinded by the Holiness that Jesus represented. The two men were wearing ceramic armor of a Christian design. The first man was Kabal, keeper of the crusaders, the second was Vega, the Esper assigned to monitor the crusader’s brainwaves.

“ The Lord is our protector,” Kabal prayed as he began to activate the automatic doors,
“ who guides us through the valley of death.”

“ They are awakening.” Vega’s mind reached into the five men inside the room which housed the crusaders.

“ May he forgive us for the sins we must commit in order to protect his followers.” Kabal continued.

There was a loud humming and then the sound of bolts moving. “ Activation almost complete.” Vega’s mind could sense the power of the crusaders as their minds linked with his.

“ LORD BRING US THE CRUSADERS!” Kabal shouted and the massive door swung open to reveal the five warriors.

They stood there, naked, their skin ghost white and crosses tattooed above their hearts. Their eyes were gold and they had no body hair. A wave of mist poured out across the floor at their feet.

“ You have summoned us?” a crusader stepped forward.

“ Yes, New Eden has been invaded by an unknown life form.” Kabal said in an almost scared voice.

“ The Lord commands us to purge all non-followers off of his world.” the crusader sounded so soulless in his remarks.

“ Yes he does!” Kabal responded, “ Go now to your machines and rid New Eden of these things. May the Lord bless you and take you to heaven.”

“ Praise the Lord!” the crusaders shouted in unison and marched past the two men.

“ I hope Janus knows what he is doing.” Vega commented to Kabal as the two men pushed the great door shut.

“ I think we should send a message to Admiral Hogun and ask him for help.” Kabal whispered so that his voice wouldn’t echo.

“ Are you mad, the UEU would rather see us all dead!” Vega’s voice echoed.

“ Quite,” Kabal put his finger to his lips, “be careful, the guards are loyal to Janus. Did you see the reports from the GCC scientists, they said that the ship had a UEU signature. Yet there was a massive alien creature in its place when it entered our space. Admiral Hogun used to be a member of the GCC and still keeps in contact with me from time to time.”

“ What makes you think he’ll be able to help us?” Vega couldn’t believe that Kabal was friends with one of the most influential UEU officers.

“ I don’t know,” Kabal responded, “ but he is in command of the 32nd fleet out of Earth. They must have a ship out here that could help.”

“ How would we contact him, you need Janus’s permission to use the long range communication system.” Vega still wasn’t sure of what to do, his loyalties were to the GCC, not the UEU.

“ I have a transmitter that Admiral Hogun gave me years ago in case we ever needed his help. I hid it under the statue of Jesus in my chapel.” Kabal started walking away from Vega.

“ Don’t tell anyone!”

“ Don’t worry, I won’t.” Vega’s mind paused and he left the presence of Kabal.

Meanwhile back on Earth, news of a different kind has hit home. Admiral Hogun just sat at his desk looking at the communication from Pluto. He didn't blink and his heart sunk so deep, he had all he could do from letting tears run down his face. The admiral's office door rang and he looked up as the door opened. It was his wife, standing there with a look of horror on her face.

"God why did it have to happen to our son?!" she cried out in anger at the admiral.

"I, I, I honestly don't know, but someone is going to pay for this!" the admiral slammed his fist down on his desk and then stood up.

His wife ran to him and they embraced, their bodies warmed each other. Mrs. Hogun shook and she cried out loud, the admiral's shoulder became damp with tears. He gripped onto her arms and pushed her back so that his eyes met hers. She had the most greenest eyes he'd ever seen, something that he'd always loved about his wife's features.

"I will take my ship to Pluto at once and find out what happened." Admiral Hogun kissed his wife.

His secretary looked in through the open door and saw the two. The admiral glanced at her "Have the crew of the *Devastator* ready to go at once, I'm leaving for Pluto."

"Admiral, I will do that, but there is a priority: RED message from New Eden for you on your private channel." she reported.

"WHAT?!" Admiral Hogun ran to his desk and his wife stood behind him.

The image was snowy, but a figure could just be made out. "This is Kabal, from New Eden, do you read me Admiral Hogun?"

"I'm here old friend," the admiral tried to adjust the reception, "what is going on? This is not the time for a social call, my son was just killed."

"Forgive me, you have my prayers, but New Eden is under attack by....." the signal went dead.

"Kabal?" Admiral Hogun tried again to get the signal back, but nothing.

"New Eden under attack? I thought they had shields to protect them from such things?" Mrs. Hogun looked surprised.

"They do, what is going on out there? New Eden is near the jump point that the *Ironside* is using for its rescue mission of the *Calisto*. Get me Admiral Tanaka on the horn!" Admiral Hogun shouted and his secretary ran out.

"Who would be able to break through the shields?" Mrs. Hogun shook her head.

"It isn't MORDUM, their fleet is so old that I doubt they would have pulled such a stunt." the admiral paused as his communication display began to ring through to Tanaka.

The *Ironside* had just come out of hyperspace when the communications officer alerted Admiral Tanaka to the message from Admiral Hogun. "What the hell does he want?"

"I don't know, sir, but it sounds important." the officer replied.

"Put him through then." there was silence on the bridge and then the admiral's display screen came up. "Ah, Admiral Hogun, what can I do for you?"

"I'll make this quick Tanaka." Hogun set aside professional courtesy. "The GCC world of New Eden might be under attack. I want you to swing by and make sure they are ok."

"Is this an order from the high ups?" Tanaka replied.

"No, it's a favor for me." Hogun paused as Tanaka began to laugh.

"A favor, hmmm." Tanaka just sat there and thought.

"Cut the shit Tanaka!" Mrs. Hogun shouted over her husband's shoulder.

"Lucy!" Admiral Hogun spun around, he stared at her in disbelief.

"Ah," Tanaka smiled, "Mrs. Hogun, such a pleasure to see you again. Just being able to see your face again is enough reason to help out your husband." Tanaka turned to his navigation officer. "Deviate course so that we come within long range sensor readings of New Eden."

"Yes Admiral!" the navigator replied.

"I'll let you know what we find." Tanaka smiled and cut off communication with Admiral Hogun.

"Lucy, what were you thinking?" the admiral stood up and hugged her.

"We don't have times for games. There are families on New Eden. Our son may be gone, but we still can save them." Lucy wiped a tear from her eye.

"You're right. I'm going to go to Pluto and then I'll head out to New Eden." Admiral Hogun sighed.

The room was silent and then the oak doors swung open.

"Traitor! How dare you conspire with the UEU!" Janus lashed out and struck Kabal across the face. Two honor guards held the keeper of the crusaders in place.

“ You are a fool to have let the crusaders fight these things!” Kabal shouted and blood trickled down his lip.

“ A fool,” Janus growled, “ you ask our enemies to come to our world to fight a war that might be a test from God?!”

Vega appeared from behind Janus, guilt covered his face. Kabal’s eyes met Vega’s, the Esper looked away in fear. Janus turned and faced Vega with a sense of pride about how the Esper turned in Kabal.

“ You bastard!” Kabal shouted and spat blood across both Janus and Vega’s robes. “ You sold me out! I did it because I don’t think the crusaders are the answer, we need scientists to tell us what those things are before we can go to war!”

“ Maybe so, but you should rely on your faith in God before that of the UEU and the RLF.” Vega defended his actions.

“ You see,” Janus said in a shallow tone, “ he believes in our Lord, like you should. Your faith makes you unworthy to be part of the Galactic Church of Christ, oh feeble Kabal.”

“ How dare you question my faith! God will judge us all and may he spare you all!” Kabal screamed as the two guards took him away.

“ What a fool, you did well Vega.” Janus wiped the blood from his robes and smiled.

“ Thankyou, I only wish to do the will of God.” Vega nodded.

Meanwhile on the other side of New Eden the first of the crusaders reached the front line. Tatus was a small township that had a population of two thousand people. It sat just at the end of the blast field, the edge being covered with downed trees and rubble. The streets were almost bare and there were only a few GCC guards on the road.

“ The plague is spreading too fast!” one guard shouted as he spotted a man laying against a house.

“ Almost everyone here is infected, may God save us!” another guard stepped away in fear.

The man’s skin had become pail and bloodshot. His eyes were oozing puss and fluids trickled out of his ears. The stench of death floated around him, yet his body moved in a liquid like way, that mimicked a water balloon. He made a slight wheezing sound as his chest moved.

“ I think he’s alive.” the guard shouted as he poked the man with his baton.

Just as the wooden baton struck the man’s skin, the flesh split open and a tentacle shot out and grabbed the guard. “ Oh my God! Help me!” the guard shouted as the tentacle wrapped itself around his neck and sprouted sharp thorns that cut into its victims skin.

“ No, no, no!” the other guard shouted as the creature exploded into a mass of tentacles and teeth. The Guard tried to run away, but another creature appeared in front of him. There was a whimper then the sounds of flesh being chewed and bones being broken.

Inside a nearby house a woman cradled her child, as her other son kept piling debris against the door. “ This should keep them out mommy!” the boy shouted as he leaned a chair against the door knob.

“ Good boy, now try to call...gurgle...” the woman’s eyes bulged out and blood spurted from her mouth.

“ Mommy!” the boy cried as a claw burst through her neck and grabbed the baby.

The ground began to rumble and the house shook violently until the walls caved in on the family. The creature spun around and looked up. Standing over it was a massive humanoid figure. Its body was covered in a carapace armor and a cape flowed off of its shoulders. In the thing’s hands was a massive sword, of chaotic design. Its eyes glowed red and it looked down on the creature. The shadow alone covered the rubble of the house.

“ Die creature of the devil!” a voice echoed from within.

The monster paused just in time to have the tip of the sword slice through its head. The crusader knelt beside his kill as it struggled to free itself from the blade. The alien went limp for a moment and then sprayed the crusader with a green liquid.

Kabal sat silent in his cell, his mind wondering what was happening to the crusaders. The thought that Vega had betrayed him also haunted him, they had been friends for years. The guard outside the cell walked away every few minutes to go listen to the war report.

“ Damn you Vega!” Kabal shouted and then a face peaked into his cell.

“ Don’t damn me, but I think you might have been right.” Vega smiled and opened the cell door.

“ What is this, another trick?” Kabal grabbed Vega and pinned him against the wall.

“ I lost my link with one of the crusaders and I am feeling a presence like nothing I’ve ever known.” Vega pushed Kabal back and glanced for the guard.

“ What are you talking about?” Kabal glanced too, realizing that the guard would soon be back.

“ I was monitoring the progress of the first crusader we sent out.” Vega explained, “ It came across one of the aliens as it was killing our people. There was the classic speech that they all do then silence a few seconds later. Next thing I know, I am hearing this voice.”

“ A voice!” Kabal shouted, his voice echoed down the hall and even drowned out the guard’s footsteps.

The two men stood there for a second and then noticed that they were being watched.

“ Go! I will take care of them!” Vega shouted and pushed Kabal away.

Kabal’s legs moved him swiftly from the prison and he made his way to the upper levels. *I have to get to the prototype. I can use that to help the crusaders and save our people.* As Kabal closed the lower level door at the top of the stairs he heard the familiar cries of Vega. The keeper closed his eyes for a second, the temptation to go back was great, but he knew there was nothing that could be done for Vega.

The palace was nearly empty, most of the guards had moved to the outer walls as a line of defense. Women and children scurried about trying to find a safe place to hide. Kabal took a deep breath and walked out into the open. No one said a thing and he proceeded to the Genesis Chamber. Just then a woman grabbed Kabal, tears ran down her face and she trembled with terror.

“ Did you hear?” she sounded desperate, “ The crusaders are coming back! They didn’t stop the invaders, all hope is lost, may the Lord protect us!”

“ God is always watching us. Go and pray for salvation.” Kabal couldn’t believe his ears. The crusaders couldn’t have beaten back the invaders. The hostiles had destroyed a quarter of the planet before he had been thrown in the cell. There was something wrong, Kabal knew he had to get to the prototype crusader mech.

The prototype crusader mecha had been grown in the Genesis Chamber only just recently. It was to be the first in a ‘super’ organic carapace mecha design. It was the first to have beam cannons and space ability, all with a completely organic power source. Janus had let Kabal grow it and to use if the crusaders ever got out of control again. Kabal was the only human to ever pilot a crusader mech. It was kept in the palace’s private Genesis Chamber which gave Kabal an advantage, he didn’t have far to go.

The entrance to the chamber was not guarded at all, Kabal was almost at a loss for words when he reached it. “ Fools, anyone could pilot this thing! There must be something really going wrong out there.” He reached up and slid his hand over the scanner at the door. There was a clicking sound and a few clangs. Then the door slowly opened revealing the prototype.

It stood about 40 ft tall and its carapace armor was dark green. At its side was a vibro sword that had many smaller bladed edges reaching out. The GCC researchers nicknamed the monster ‘Kabal’ after the keeper. It was flattering to have a monster named after you, but at the same time, it was unsettling.

“ I never thought the day would come when I would have to take you into battle.” Kabal walked over to a computer terminal and activated it.

“ To all citizens of New Eden,” it was Janus over the planet communications network, “ Today we are thrust into a new era. The crusaders are on their way back. God has granted us victory over the invaders! We ask that you go to the nearest shelter in case of unknown contamination. Thankyou, God Bless!”

“ You make me sick!” Kabal activated the outside scanners and his heart skipped a beat.

“ The crusaders didn’t do anything except wipe out a town near the buffer zone! Sensors show that they are infected with some organism and it’s spreading through their armor! Time to go to work and see if Kabal works!”

Frozen Front

In the deeper part of the human empire floats the ice planet Arctoris. Far from the influence from the Russian Liberation Force and the United Earth Union, this world has been left unscarred by the wars fought so many years ago. The only sign of humanity is the ice station Horus, used as a listening post by the RLF to make sure no invasion group from another race sneak up on the human colonies.

The surface had begun to ice over after the last daylight. A slight dusting flew into the air as the patrol Stingray skimmed along the horizon. The transformable fighter had been modified for the cold weather on the planet. The pilot was from the 56 UEU Mechanized Space Division and had been transferred to Arctoris. It was Lieutenant Trish Decker’s second assignment after the Battle of New Africa when she was shot down and seriously injured. The commander of the UEU forces took her to Arctoris with him along with his son.

“ Clear skies today Beckman.” Trish’s voice crackled over the radio as the sun shimmered off her goggles.

“ It may be there , but the scanner is showing a squall starting up in the southern area.” Sergeant Joel Beckman replied as he watched the long range sensors light up.

“ That’s odd, I don’t see it on my scanners.” Trish checked her view screen, nothing.

“ I don’t know how the stingray will hold up in that type of weather.” Joel transmitted the weather report.

“ I’m not seeing it out here,” Decker looked out the cockpit window to see clear skies, “ just clear skies. Are you playing with my Joel?”

“ Look, it says here that there is a squall starting up. Would I lie to you? Besides I know you plan on skiing at the West ridge, I wouldn’t want you to get lost.” Joel smiled.

“ Shhhh! Don’t let the Commander know!” Trish’s cheeks turned red.

“ You’re secret’s safe with me, but be careful because I doubt Doc wants to go out in that mess today.” Sgt. Beckman looked at his sensors again.

“ I’ll make it quick then,” Trish laughed, “ I owe you one Beckman.”

“ Happy hunting Lieutenant, this is ice station Horus signing off.” Beckman spun his chair and standing in front of him was Kadja, the base commander’s son.

“ Is Auntie Trish gonna get into trouble? Daddy said no recreation.” the little boy blinked.

“ Don’t worry little buddy,” Joel scooped up the boy and flipped him upside down, “ Daddy doesn’t need to know.” The sergeant began to tickle the boy, who squirmed to break free.

“ Uncle Becky,” Kadja squealed, “ stop it, dat tickles!”

“ Ok little buddy, go play.” Joel set down the boy and slapped him on the ass to move him along.

Meanwhile in another place, another time.

The bright sun shining on my face, fumes from air cars floating by. At my side is my wife, her dark skin absorbs the rays of light. Such peace on New Africa, the architecture reminds me of Earth’s 21st century. A red ball rolls by and our son chases after it with such energy. Such silence and peace, but wait, who is this man behind us?

“ Die Ambassador Hoffman!” the man screams as he brandishes a beam pistol.

Explosions all around, sirens and echoes of fighters crashing, what is happening!? Invasion, but how, my God I have to save my family. That flash and Jenna is falling to the ground, her uniform has a burn in it. I kneel beside her, “ You killed her you monster!” My screams are drowned out as a Terror Guard rushes into the room and bloodily rips out the spine of the assassin. His eyes are soulless and there is no expression on his face. Yet, he doesn’t stop there, my son, he’s going for my son! NOOOOOO!

“ Commander, wake up!” a voice breaks through the dream.

Commander Hoffman’s eyes opened wide and he looked around to see Sgt. Burrow standing over him with a look of concern on his face. “ What is it Burrow?”

“ We lost contact with Trish while she was on patrol.” Ralph Burrow explained. Ralph was part of the Russian Liberation Force, allies of the UEU. He was an engineer and a recon specialist.

“ Can we locate her Stingray on the scanners?” Cmdr. Hoffman sat up in his chair and picked up his cooled down coffee.

“ Beckman tried, but there is a strong magnetic field blocking our sensors.” Ralph ran his hand over his short black hair and sighed.

“ What is the temperature out there?” Hoffman asked as he turned on his computer, it hummed for a second and a read out of the weather and temperature came up. “ 40 below 0 degrees, it’s too cold to take the drop ship out. Any suggestions?”

“ The Stingray is built for space combat, she should be all right with all the backup systems.” Burrow smiled for a second, “ Not to mention she packed that thing full of cold weather gear telling Beckman and I that she was going skiing.”

“ You two head out there ASAP in the morning and find her! GOT IT!” Cmdr. Hoffman yelled and Burrow scurried out of his office.

“ Dammit Trish!” Hoffman made a sour face as he realized just how cold his coffee was. He looked over his desk and resting to his left was a picture of a beautiful woman, her dark skin so pure. In the background was a replica of the Statue of Liberty. The picture was taken on Planet Ellis, also known as Ellis Island II. It was where he first met his now deceased wife, while on a peace mission to a Galactic Church of Christ space station. It wasn’t until later that they would wed and have a son.

The transfer tunnel was empty, melting ice dripped from the ceiling. Small foot steps echoed through the passageway and a little boys voice could be heard singing a little tune.

In front of him was a red ball, wet from being kicked across puddles. The boy was about 7 years old, his dark skin blended in with his hood. The ball rolled to a stop and Kadja ran up on it again, his foot impacting and sending it another few feet. The boy was the only surviving relative of Commander Hoffman. His dad brought him to Arctoris to get his son away from MORDUM assassins and the influence of the Galactic Church of Christ. It was here that Kadja recovered from witnessing his mother’s death at the hands of a MORDUM soldier.

Kadja ran to where the ball had stopped and noticed something half hunched over at the intersection. It had the form of a hairless ape like creature about 4 feet tall, its veins showed through the skin and what looked like blood pumping inside. A strange colorless drool fell from the thing's lip onto the floor and it moaned a dull low sound.

"Would you like to play?" Kadja asked, but the thing just stood there. The little boy walked up to the creature and reached out. There was a snapping sound and then silence.

The next morning the launch bay doors opened and the UEU drop ship flew out into the Arctoris air. Sgt. Beckman and Sgt. Burrow headed to find their lost pilot, wondering if she was still alive.

"The gear ready?" Beckman asked as Burrow pulled out the last beam rifle from the weapons locker.

"All set, lets find Trish." Burrow smiled as he locked in the spike line attachment to the beam rifle.

"Sensors are picking up that magnetic field again." Joel clicked a switch and another display came up. There was a circled pattern that covered a four mile radius. "I think that might be what could have brought her down. I'll set the drop ship over that ridge and well hike in."

"I'll get out the snow shoes then." Ralph smiled, he loved to go snow shoeing out in the rough. It reminded him of Mother Russia of old, before the great building of the RLF bases, that now litter over half the country. Yet it was the Russian Liberation Force that was the front line of defense during the first great war. Ralph was a proud member, remembering back to the day he saw the signing of the Washington Accord on Pluto. It was that Accord that saved Russia's heritage from being wiped out by the ever growing United Earth Union.

The drop ship caused a blast of loose snow into the air as it landed. The cargo door opened and the two men stepped out onto the snowy terrain. The sun made the ice crystals sparkle brightly, the rays splitting off in many directions. Their snow gear was grey with a white face plate covering their skin. Each man had a set of multi-optic goggles and a beam rifle which was slung to their sides. The snow shoes made a crunching sound on the icy tundra as Burrow and Beckman treaded out across.

"Lets do it." Beckman pulled his hood tight and raised his rifle.

"Out into the white yonder." Burrow laughed as they headed over the first hill.

Beckman was glad he had been on so many missions, because hiking in the tundra would have killed him otherwise. Joel started to remember the first time he met Ralph Burrow. The two had been stationed at Fort Rockford, on Pegasus Prime. They had become good friends and when the fort was attacked by MORDUM (Mankind's Organized Dictatorship Under Mars), they ended up fighting side by side until the RLF fleet arrived. Later they would both end up on Arctoris with Commander Hoffman, a cold hearted UEU officer who's wife had been killed during the Battle of New Africa.

They walked for about two miles until their goggles started to act weird. Burrow tapped his goggles and then smacked them. "Damn, this thing is acting up!"

"So is mine, we must be near the magnetic field. Check the rifles to make sure they are going to work." Beckman pulled out his communicator pad and plugged it into his head piece.

Ralph pulled the rifle close and saw that the power gauge was blank. "Oh man this is bad, the rifles are dead."

"Wait a second, Ralph!" Joel tugged on Ralph's sleeve and pointed to a mass partly buried under the snow. "It looks like a stingray lets check it out."

"What about the rifles?" Ralph smacked the palm of his hand on the weapon.

"We have the spike lines if we need to fight." Joel started to run down the hill.

Ralph watched as his friend ran with the snow shoes. He could tell that Beckman had never really used a pair before, but he knew enough to look funny running. Burrow made his way down the slope with Beckman until they reached the object.

"Decker!" Joel shouted, there was a pause.

The ground began to shake and the object surfaced. It was human shaped and almost looked like one of the RFL's giant robots, but it's face plate was different. The eyes glowed red and there was the humming of machine parts as it stood up. The robot was almost thirty feet tall and the snow fell off in massive waves.

"Oh shit!" Ralph raised his weapon and took aim.

The ground around the two men shook violently and then they found themselves surrounded by a group of machines similar to the giant one, but they were human sized. Each robot held what looked like a beam rifle. They were like nothing ever seen by man, except that they had a resemblance to RLF combat transformable vehicles. "Hold it humans! Do not move!"

"No way!" Joel glanced around for a second, they were truly in trouble.

"I think we'd better do as they say." Ralph slowly put his rifle on the ground.

Just then the giant robot's chest opened up revealing a compartment. Inside was Trish, sitting rather uncomfortably on a metal bench.

"Nice rescue guys!" Trish shouted and then smiled.

The group of robots moved aside and a white robot with a white cross stepped forward.

"We come in peace human." its' mechanical voice hummed.

"Um..... ok lets hear it." Joel lowered his rifle.

"Kadja!" Cmdr. Hoffman shouted down the passageway, but he was met with a reply of echoes. He walked a few more yards and saw his son's red ball floating in a puddle. Lewis's heart began to race, something didn't feel right. The officer slowly reached for his beam pistol and drew it out of its' resting place from his side. *Feels like and ambush* he thought and leaned to one side to examine the latter half of the hall.

Ahead of him was a shadow, the shape not human. *Whoever that is, they aren't looking too friendly* thought Hoffman as he brought his wrist com-link to his mouth. "Lights, Y sector activate."

The dim hallway lit up as the lights activated. Standing in the passage was a creature made of translucent flesh and looked almost human. The organs could be seen and blood pumped swiftly throughout the body. At its' feet was Kadja, laying still with a small cut on his face exposing pink innards. The creature looked at Cmdr. Hoffman and smiled, showing a row of sharp teeth.

Oh my God, I know that face! That looks like the GCC terrorist Tarren, but how? Hoffman raised his beam pistol and switched off the safety. "I don't know what you are, but say goodbye to your existence!"

"We must evolve," the creature moaned as it leaned over Kadja, "this boy will be consumed like your entire race."

Lewis Hoffman had fought in many wars and killed hundreds of men. He had been hailed as a war hero and was known for his cold blooded battle rages. Hoffman was sent to Arctoris by the UEU after he killed a Terror Guard soldier during the Battle of New Africa. He had seen his wife cut down and that pushed him over the edge. Hoffman's eyes went cold and his face became a world of fury.

"Fear not human, you too will have the blessing of being consumed." the creature's mouth widened and an tongue rolled out and down to Kadja.

"Consume this!" the beam pistol fired, the ray of light cutting through the creatures mouth and severing it's tongue.

"Over here!" a voice shouted and Hoffman turned to see the base's doctor with a beam rifle. "Shall we?"

"Burn it!" Hoffman shouted and in a matter of seconds all that was left of the monster was a pile of burnt flesh.

"God it smells bad." Max stood over the creatures smoldering corpse.

"Leave it here for now," Hoffman scooped up his son, "you need to attend to my son."

A few minutes later in the medical lab.

"The cut isn't bad at all, but there is some type of cell mutation occurring in his body." Max leaned away from the med scanner.

Kadja's form was on a wide screen that sat over his bed. Lewis clenched his fist and turned around to the doctor. "What the hell was that thing down there? I've never seen anything like that."

"It looked like it was evolving, but into what?" Max sighed and inserted a blood sample into the computer.

"Or who." Hoffman paused.

"What do you mean who?" Dr. Patrick looked at his commander with an odd look of confusion.

"If I didn't know better it looked like Tarren, the GCC terrorist." Lewis waited for a reply. There was a silence then he looked at the doctor.

"Tarren was exiled from the Galactic Church of Christ years ago, besides he couldn't be here." Max spun his chair. "Look that was a hideous thing, but it wasn't Tarren. Not to get off the subject, but where are the other three?"

"They located Lt. Decker and they were coming back. They should be here by now." Hoffman looked at his watch and then there was a buzz.

It was the sound of the landing bay door buzzer. The drop ship was back and soon Beckman, Decker and Burrow would be coming through the door laughing about their day out in the tundra. Commander Hoffman and Doctor Patrick sat in the med bay as the door slid open. Beckman walked in the room with his arms above his head.

"Did you guys have fun?" Hoffman scowled, but then it changed as Trish and Burrow walked in with their arms above their heads as well.

"Not really, sir." Beckman looked like he had let someone down.

"How so?" Hoffman asked, but his answer followed the three into the room.

Behind them were four robots armed with what appeared to be beam rifles. Their eyes glowed red and they looked humanoid, but with black metal armor. Behind them was a white robot with a red cross on its chest. It quickly moved to Kadja's bed and started working with the computer.

"Get the hell away from my son!" Hoffman shouted and he drew his beam pistol.

"Halt, human!" one robot shouted and shoved his rifle in the officer's face.

"Your son has been contaminated by the X0045 species. We must act before he begins a full mutation." the white robot's voiced hummed.

"The what?" Max looked lost.

"Who the hell are you!?" Lewis pushed the robot in front of him aside.

"We are allies." at that moment Beckman, Decker and Burrow lowered their arms.

"Sir, listen to this." Beckman pulled out a recorder and hit play.

"This is Captain Mariner of the Scout ship *Calisto*. These robots rescued my men and I from the Xmorphs, a race bent on consuming the entire universe. They are here to assist the UEU in a new war, one that will determine the future of both our races. Cooperate at all costs, I will transmit further orders when their fleet reaches UEU space. Good luck." the message ended.

"Your son's body needs to be put in stasis, Commander Hoffman." the white robot put its' hand on Kadja's head. There was a loud hum and Kadja began to twitch. A second later the robots chest opened up and it removed a smaller robot. It was black with two little red eyes, fully humanoid.

It ran over to Hoffman and hugged his leg. "Daddy!"

"What the hell!" Lewis jumped back in shock.

"Did you just do a mind transfer?" Max ran over to Kadja's body.

"In order to allow your son to live somewhat normally we transferred his essence into a temporary body." the robot explained, "His organic form needs to be put in stasis until our fleet arrives. You do not have the proper equipment for me to stop the mutation."

"That's amazing!" Max bent over and looked at the small black robot. "Hello there Kadja."

"Why are you looking at me so funny, Maxxy?" the robot asked.

"Little buddy, you're a robot" Joel smiled and picked Kadja up. "See." He moved her over to the bed where Kadja's organic body rested.

"Wow! I'm a real robot!" Kadja cheered.

"That truly is amazing, you are able to do the transfer without another machine!" Max looked over the medical robot.

"I am a medical series bot, equipped for field repairs." the robot explained.

Cmdr Hoffman stood against the wall, a look of anger had washed across his face. Trish noticed and walked over rubbing his back. "It's ok, at least Kadja has a chance. According to reports by these robots, the mutation just doesn't kill the person, it takes their memories as well."

"What, so my son can live as a machine?" Lewis pulled away. "Leave me alone, Trish!"

Lewis walked out of the medical lab leaving everyone behind. His mind so lost and confused by the days events, he just needed to sleep.